

ALWAYS ROOM AT THE TOP:
BLACK STUDENTS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN ITHACA, NY

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by
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Frequently referred to as the achievement gap, racial disparities in educational outcomes are reported in school districts across the nation. Most educational research focuses on this crisis in urban communities, and overcrowded classrooms, underfunded schools, unqualified teachers as well as inadequate resources are some of the commonly identified causes. However, racial disparities are equally found in top-rated districts where these factors are least likely to exist. The growing body of research documenting racial disparities in top-rated districts has challenged the conventional wisdom about the origin, causes, and solutions of racial disparities in schools.

Drawing on tenets from Afrocentricity and critical race theory, this dissertation explores educational inequity and related policy in a top-rated, suburban school district. The project examines the historic roots of racial disparities in this district and employs qualitative interviews with black students as a means to analyze and better understand how students experience these disparities. On the basis of this investigation and its findings, policy recommendations are made for the purpose of helping districts such as the one studied close their education gap. Ultimately, the study also concludes that educational reforms will be ineffective unless they address the fact that racial disparities are often linked to and rooted in institutionalized policies and practices that are deeply entrenched and protected at the community level.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sean W. Eversley Bradwell is an alumnus of Amsterdam High School (NY). He completed his B.A. in political science from the University of Rochester and his M.S. from Rochester's Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Mr. Eversley Bradwell began teaching in Ithaca (NY) during the fall of 1996 and has held positions as a lecturer, assistant to the principal, and social studies teacher.

To
Mildred '*Aunt Millie*' Mason
and
Ashfield Muhammad '*Uncle Buster*' Devent

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PREFACE

In the fall of 1996, I accepted a position at the Lehman Alternative Community School (Ithaca, NY). The position was a joint appointment to teach in the social studies department and to serve as the *assistant to the principal for minority student affairs*. In response to parent organizing, the *assistant to the principal* position had been created “to increase [school] effectiveness . . . in meeting the educational needs of minority students.”¹ I had just completed a master’s thesis with a similar focus but quickly realized that advocating for educational reform was no longer a research exercise. It was now a professional responsibility.

In order to match educational *resources* with educational *needs*, I joined school committees and community organizations. I worked with Parents of African-Latino Students (PALS), the Ithaca City School District Affirmative Action Committee, Site-Base Councils, the School Issues Group, the Village at Ithaca, and numerous others. I worked with educational experts, parents, activists, community leaders, teachers, and students. I worked evenings, weekends, and summers. Educational outcomes now had names and families. Meeting the educational needs of black and brown students now had faces. Though this particular research project has roots in my own educational experiences, it was the quest to succeed in my role as the *assistant to the principal for minority student affairs* that ignited a deeper investigation into Ithaca schools.

Throughout this journey, I have taught in secondary schools and college classrooms. I have entered Ithaca schools on a daily basis—as a teacher, parent, researcher, moderator, professor, student, and more. The following pages are informed

¹ Taken from a proposal submitted to the ICSD Board of Education by student representatives from the Alternative Community School. The proposal, dated 14 November 1993, called for a “minority affairs specialist” and became the job description for the assistant to the principal for minority affairs position.

by these professional and personal experiences. The following pages reveal my quest to gain clarity around disproportionate educational outcomes in Ithaca, NY.

If done well, this dissertation reflects a tension between the informal and formal. My natural voice—as once commented on an undergraduate paper—is a style that “bounces, at times, between the academic and colloquial.” On the one hand, my choice of voice is a stylistic nod to folks like bell hooks, James Baldwin, and W. E. B. DuBois. On the other, it is an intellectual nod to the music and cultural movement in which I was raised.

The *word* is a critical component of hip-hop culture. Yes, there are four generally agreed-upon components of hip-hop culture, and most scholarship identifies MCing, DJing, Writing, and BBoying/BGirling as the four main tenets of the culture. And yes, hip-hop pioneers, like the Zulu Nation, argue for a fifth tenet, of knowledge—or knowing.

But, at its core, hip-hop is about the *word*. Hip-hop culture engages in *word* play. Much like the ways of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or El Hajj Malik El Shabazz (Malcolm X)—the greatest of hip-hop practitioners make words dance. They string words together in ways that sing. Cadence. Intonation. Tempo. Flow. For prolific practitioners—as with the prolific griots, graffiti artists, and MCs—there is a rhythm to the message.

Moreover, my introduction to the ideas of *Afrocentricity* comes by way of hip-hop. It was 1982, and my first memorized verse, when Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five “merged Afrocentric consciousness expressed by such early rappers as Gil Scot-Heron and The Last Poets with b-boy production” (Bogdanov, Woodstra, & Erlewine, 2002, p. 479). The distinctive voice of Melle Mel pierced the track,

*Broken glass everywhere
People pissin' on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise*

*Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'cuz a man with a tow truck repossessed my car*

It has become commonplace for hip-hop scholars to cite *The Message*—and this particular verse—in the retelling of hip-hop history (Chang, 2005; George, 1998). The song's influence and legacy extend far beyond hip-hop and may explain why the 2002 National Recording Registry included *The Message* as one of the nation's audio recordings most worth preserving.² In short, the song's standing in hip-hop lore is rightly justified. From the moment the track filled my ears, it solidified hip-hop as a constant presence in my life.

Between the years 1985 and 1994, and largely influenced by the socioeconomic commentary of *The Message*, hip-hop brandished a particular interpretation of *Afrocentricity*. This era of hip-hop produced a number of artists who were promoting *Afrocentricity* “as an intellectual program that would de-center Eurocentric educational bias, recover and reclaim the lost ancient roots of African glory, and re-center African thought and experience in the production of knowledge and self” (Chang, 2005, p. 265). Hip-hop artists/groups ranged from the Universal Zulu Nation, to Brand Nubian, X-Clan, Queen Latifah, Poor Righteous Teachers, and Public Enemy. Images of postcolonial leaders, Africa medallions, Malcolm X samples, and references to pan-African unity were routine during this *golden era* (Chang, 2005).

When, in 1988, Chuck D claimed hip-hop to be *the Black CNN*, he was not making a reference to hip-hop as simply a news provider. Chuck D was making an observation about hip-hop's internal, or in-group, dialogue. Hip-hop was the “cipher

² See National Recording Preservation Board of the Library of Congress. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/rr/record/nrpb/nrpb-masterlist.html>.

to understand blackness” (Baldwin, 1999, p. 163). It was an information exchange. It was call-and-response. In this era, hip-hop functioned as primarily black audiences in conversation with primarily black artists.

In many respects, this *golden era* encouraged a “1960s-style nationalist vision of community” (Swedenburg, 1992, p. 587). The era’s catalogue includes songs titles such as “You Must Learn,” “Self-Destruction,” “U.N.I.T.Y.,” “Wake Up,” and “Fight the Power.” Listeners were encouraged to consider the word, and the world, more critically. It is this era of hip-hop, with its experimental notions of *Afrocentricity*, that helped shaped how I see the world and myself. Like other black youth growing up in the 1980s, I began to see the merging of hip-hop and *Afrocentricity* as a “critical social theory interested in addressing *the* social problems” (Hill Collins, 2006, p. 96).

This is not to say that hip-hop is beyond rebuke or critique. Violence, homophobia, misogyny, and rampant materialism are some of the nation’s biggest problems. These issues are also prominent in some genres of hip-hop. Fortunately, the culture includes significant numbers of folks who talk back. If *Afrocentricity* is the “productive thrust of language into the unknown in an attempt to create harmony and balance in the midst of disharmony” (Asante, 1987, p. 35), then hip-hop is the theme music.

It is important to situate my voice and earliest understanding of *Afrocentricity* by way of its introduction through hip-hop. In more than one respect, hip-hop helps to explain the location—the center—from where I “observe and judge world events and human developments” (Keto, 1995, p. 20). It helps explain the use of language, the style of writing and—like the griots/MCs—the role of story.

This dissertation is a story. It is not a children’s story, though young people are prominent. It is not an epic, though it is informed by centuries of history. And it is not

a fable, though it does include judgments of morality. It is an educational counter-narrative and tells a story of educational success and struggle in Ithaca, NY.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, black students are almost four times more likely to be placed in special education classes, nearly three times more likely to be suspended from school, and at least twice as likely to exit high school without a diploma.³ In fact, by nearly every statistical determinant, black students in U.S. public schools are negatively and disproportionately represented.

Theresa Perry (2003) writes,

On whatever measure one uses, from the SAT to the Stanford Nine, in school districts and schools across the country; irrespective of political orientation, demographic characteristics, or per-pupil spending, there exists a gap between the academic performance of Black and Latino students on the one hand and White and Asian American students on the other. (p. 7)

The disparity in statistics is commonly referred to as the “achievement gap” and, along with national alarm, there has been a myriad of policy reforms aimed *to close the gap*.

The *gap* in educational outcomes is not due to lack of attention. Policy makers and politicians have long utilized education as a strategic issue. The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and the golden celebrations of the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court (1954) decision offer two examples of wide public exposure, but equally demonstrate the tacit ineffectiveness of educational policies. Even as President George W. Bush (2001) heralded the *Brown v. Board* decision as one that “recognized the constitutional right to freedom from racial discrimination in our public schools,”⁴

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks*, (NCES 2003–034), by Kathryn Hoffman and Charmaine Llagas. Project Officer: Thomas D. Snyder. Washington, DC: 2003.

⁴ Bush, G. W. (2001). President Signs Brown v. Board of Education Anniversary Commission, *Office of the White House Press Secretary*. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010919-16.html>.

scholars continue to find significant racial disparities in U.S. public education (Kozol, 2005; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Wynn, 1999).

Most of the energy and research spent attempting to eliminate the achievement gap focuses on urban schools and urban communities. This attention is rightfully placed for two reasons. First, the majority of black students attend urban schools. In New York State, the *Big Five* school districts—New York City, Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, and Yonkers—are home to nearly 75% of all black students in the state.⁵ New York City alone is charged with educating over 60% of all black students in the state. Thus, the focus on urban schools is an attempt to address the realities for most black students.

The second reason for the focus on urban schools is the solidification of urban communities with various forms of segregation. In fact, “central cities of large metropolitan areas are the epicenter of segregation” (Orfield & Lee, 2004, p. 2). As Jonathan Kozol (2005) writes, “Hypersegregated inner-city schools—in which one finds no more than five or ten White children, at the very most, within a student population of as many as 3,000—are the norm, not the exception, in most northern urban areas today” (para. 1). While much is made of racial segregation, this is not the only segregation of concern.

Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee (2006) write that segregation “is almost always double or triple segregation, involving concentrated poverty and, increasingly, linguistic segregation, and this multiple segregation is almost always related to many forms of tangible inequality in educational opportunity on multiple dimensions” (p. 4). The presence of concurrent forms of segregation helps to explain why Derrick Bell (2004) has argued that the *Brown v. Board* decision might have been better if it had

⁵ *Distribution of Black and Hispanic Public School Students New York State 2005–06*. Available from the New York State Department of Education: <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/educationstats/edstats-08/TABLE5.pdf>.

affirmed rather than overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson*. For Bell, we should spend less time trying to integrate students, and more time trying to integrate the resources.

There is little debate regarding the dire economic challenges facing urban communities. Manning Marable (2004) states,

Within whole U.S. urban neighborhoods losing virtually their entire economic manufacturing and industrial employment, and with neoliberal social policies in place cutting job training programs, welfare, and public housing, millions of Americans now exist in conditions that exceed the devastation of the Great Depression of the 1930s. (p. 4)

One legacy of de-industrialization and *benign neglect* has been “the restoration of apartheid schooling in America.”⁶ Thus, given the number of students and the unconscionable condition of urban schools, most research and policy initiatives focus on major metropolitan districts (Clemmitt, 2007; Taylor, 2005).

Nonetheless, and even in the face of hypersegregation, Orfield and Lee (2006) indicate that there is a concurrent phenomenon. The authors write,

Resegregation has been a well-documented phenomena. One could make the argument growing segregation of black and Latino students from white students is a basic educational trend. But there is another large and more encouraging development—the emergence of multiracial schools on a large scale. (p. 15)

In other words, whereas multiracial schools have always existed, these were frequently small, independent schools. The past couple of decades have also witnessed large public high schools with well over 1,000 students *and* sizable multiracial populations. The Ithaca City School District (ICSD) is one such district and educates more than 5,000 students from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds (see Table 1).

Erwin Flaxman (2003) argues there are more students of color attending suburban schools than typically assumed and adds, “we now recognize that there is an

⁶ This phrase is borrowed from Kozol, J. (2005). *The Shame of the Nation: the restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York: Crown Publishing.

even greater gap in student achievement in schools in suburban middle-income communities than in the inner cities, particularly at the higher achievement levels” (p. 1). In other words, racial disparities in educational outcomes are not limited to students attending urban schools and, as will be explored, the disparities may even be more pronounced in suburban schools.

Table 1: Population Percentages by Race/Ethnicity

United States ⁷		ICSD ⁸
.8%.....	American Indian or Alaska Native 1%
12%.....	Black or African American 12%
14%.....	Hispanic or Latino 5%
5%.....	Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander 11%
73%.....	White 71%

In many respects, the prominent racial gaps in suburban schools are counterintuitive. Factors frequently attributed to the prevalence of the *achievement gap* in urban schools are least likely to exist in suburban schools. By and large, urban schools are said to “have more teachers who are inexperienced, poorly trained and uncertified; more textbooks that are outdated; fewer computers; larger class sizes and buildings that are in worse repair” (Evans, 2005, p. 583). Others talk of gross underfunding (Carey, 2003), lack of qualified teachers (Peske & Crawford, 2006), inadequate resources (Kozol, 2005), and decrepit infrastructure (Kozol, 1991) as the most-cited contributors to failing urban schools.

⁷ Statistics obtained from United States Census Bureau—<http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

⁸ Ithaca City School District—Accountability and Overview Report 2006–07. New York State Comprehensive Report Card (2008). Available at: <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/>.

On the contrary, suburban schools typically experience none of the above. On average, suburban schools have the highest per-pupil expenditures, state-of-the-art facilities, access to the best and most qualified teachers, and a wide range of curricular as well as co-curricular options (Wells & Crain, 1997). Despite the absence of factors frequently identified as the causes of racially disparate outcomes, “the achievement gap between white and minority students in suburban districts is actually larger than it is nationally” (Alson, 2003, p. 4).

Within the past decade, a growing number of suburban communities have “acknowledged the racial and ethnic achievement disparities in their primary and secondary schools” (Ferguson, 2002, p. 2). In fact, a consortium of relatively diverse, affluent, and educated communities have formed the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) in order “to study the disparity in achievement between white students and students of color through intensive research.”⁹

It may not be a coincidence that a majority of MSAN districts are located in college or university towns. Gumprecht (2003) defines a university or college town as “any city where a college or university and the culture it creates exert a dominant influence over the character of the community” (p. 51). Amherst, Princeton, Ann Arbor, Eugene, Madison, Chapel Hill, Cambridge, and Evanston are all communities with rich histories of academic excellence. All are founding MSAN members. And nearly all of the MSAN schools can be found on national lists of the best school districts in the United States.¹⁰ In short, even in the best school districts, and in communities where education literally dominates the landscape, racial disparities in educational outcomes are pronounced.

⁹ Minority Student Achievement Network. (2007). “About MSAN.” Retrieved from <http://msan.wceruw.org/overview.asp>.

¹⁰ Kantrowitz, B. (2005, May 16). The 100 Best High Schools in America. *Newsweek*, 145(2), p. 48. For a full listing of the “top” 1300 schools, see Jay Matthews Challenge Index hosted by the Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/education/challenge/2005/challengeindex01.html>.

It is within this context that this project turns attention to Ithaca, NY. While not a member of MSAN, Ithaca shares numerous qualities of MSAN districts. Not only is Ithaca a quintessential university town—housing both an Ivy League university and a selective private college—the district also has a legacy and reputation as one of the nation’s finest (Matthews, 2000).

By most academic measures, Ithaca is a community of academic excellence. In the Ithaca City School District, more than half of high school students enroll in honors courses, more than 80% of graduates attend four-year colleges, and nearly 15% of graduates go on to attend Ivy League schools.¹¹ Ithaca has an active drama club, an award-winning orchestra, and nationally ranked science clubs. As evidence of the ICSD’s academic excellence, Ithaca High School repeatedly appears on national lists of the best high schools in the country.¹² Given the fact that there are over 20,000 high schools in the United States, Ithaca’s appearance on these lists places the high school (community) in the top 97th percentile.¹³

However, data found in the Ithaca City School District’s *Annual Equity Report Cards* reflect many distressing trends reminiscent of the national data (See Appendix 1). The equity report cards indicate that black students in Ithaca schools are far more likely to be suspended, more likely to be identified as special education students, less likely to be enrolled in Advanced Placement/honors courses, and less likely to receive

¹¹ These numbers are taken from Barr, D., & D. Bock. (2000). A Retrospective Study of the Impact of Race And Class on Academic Success at Ithaca High School; the First Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable; and the IHS—2006 College Profile.

¹² Mathews, J. (2000, March 13). The 100 Best High Schools. *Newsweek*, 135(11). Ithaca High School was ranked as the 83rd best high school in the United States in 2000. Subsequent yearly rankings have placed IHS in the top 350. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicates there are over 18,000 public high schools in 2003–2004. This number does not include private schools.

¹³ See U.S. News and World Report’s database on *America’s Best High Schools* (2008). Available at: <http://www.usnews.com/sections/education/high-schools/>. According to this ranking system, the top 100 high schools in the nation received gold medals. The next 400 were designated as silver medal recipients. Ithaca High School was a silver medal recipient. *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*, and other ranking systems are widely disputed and their methodologies frequently debated. Still, the preponderance of such rankings indicates they have value if only in our perceptions of what constitutes a quality education.

a high school diploma.¹⁴ In fact, according to a front-page newspaper article in a local newspaper, black students experience a roughly 50% chance of graduating from one of the best high schools in the country.¹⁵

The listing of statistical disproportionality by racial classification could continue *ad nauseam*. There are pronounced racial differences in math and language arts test scores, school participation in clubs and extracurricular options, school award recipients and recognitions, dropout rates and more. All of these disparities have been thoroughly documented in both local media as well as the annual equity report cards.

To compound the disparities in discipline, achievement, participation, and test scores, another distressing phenomenon has consistently surfaced—the existence of racial tensions. These tensions have become violent, and school fights occur episodically if not cyclically. In the aftermath of the two most recent altercations, half of the student body stayed home from school in fear of increased racial violence.¹⁶ Harvard University researchers, the U.S. Office of Civil Rights, the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission, and the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service have conducted separate investigations within the past decade.

In the fall of 2007, students led a walkout in protest of the existing tensions and feelings of racial inequity. In an open letter to the community expressing the rationale for the walkout, student organizers stated,

We walked out of school for a reason, not because we are “class-cutting trouble-makers.” The Countdown to Equality is not about violence. It is about justice. We want equality. We want an end to discrimination of all kinds in the ICSD. Despite what has happened so far, and the obstacles we have faced, this

¹⁴ Ithaca City School District. (2006). First Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY.

¹⁵ Ju, A. (2005, February 12). How our kids become unequal. *Ithaca Journal*, p. 1A.

¹⁶ Ju, A. (2004, March 24). 5 teens charged after fight at IHS. *Ithaca Journal*. Also see Sanders, T. (2007, October 19). Absences spike over IHS safety. *Ithaca Journal*.

campaign is not over. We want to remember yesterday, but live for tomorrow!¹⁷

To this end, we can cite the Ithaca City School District's Board of Education goals approved during the summer of 2002. The Board of Education (BoE) approved four goals designed to improve "student achievement in accord with the District's Mission."¹⁸ The first goal has garnered the most attention and, as indicated by the ICSD BoE minutes, "The immediate objective is to support all students with programs that *eliminate race and class as a predictor of performance*" (emphasis added).¹⁹ In summation, and despite the educational accolades awarded the Ithaca School District, marked racial disparities exist in its public schools.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Given the racial disparities in Ithaca schools, the purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of black students and to then utilize the narratives to formulate policy initiatives that support positive educational outcomes. There are two major research questions that guide this project:

1. What do black students say about their educational experiences?
2. What policies can be created from the narratives of black students?

Patricia Hill Collins states, "Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experience can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow

¹⁷ Student letter, "Don't Let Jena Happen Here" (2007, October 19). Also see Sanders, T. (2007, October 11). Protest, lockdown at IHS over inequity. *Ithaca Journal*. Retrieved from <http://theithacajournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20071011/NEWS01/710110354/0/SPECIAL02>

¹⁸ Ithaca City School District Board of Education. (2002, August 27). Monthly Voting Minutes, p. 5.

¹⁹ Ithaca City School District Board of Education. (2002, August 27). Monthly Voting Minutes, p. 5. It should also be noted that most critical race theorist and multicultural educators adamantly challenge the concept of *race*. It is not uncommon for scholars to argue that *race* is a social construction. In other words, there is no biological reality to what is commonly perceived as *race*. This project operates under a similar understanding but adds that *race* is also a legal, political, and historic construction. Thus, while *race* may be a scientific myth, it has concrete consequences in society and schools.

subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications” (Collins, 1991, p. 222).

As such, the study also has two main areas of significance. First, the project adds to the discourse on black students in high-performing suburban schools. Despite the growing body of literature (Alson, 2003; Ferguson, 2002; Ferguson, Clark, & Stewart, 2002; Ray-Taylor, Baskerville, Bruder, Bennett, & Schulte, 2006), the scholarship regarding racial disparities in suburban, high-performing districts remains underexplored. This is especially true given the steadfast belief in the idea that “the social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student’s own social background, than is any school factor” (Coleman, quoted in Rumberger & Palardy, 2005, p. 1999). In other words, many policies to improve education for black students seek to replicate suburban schools.²⁰ Adding to the discourse about the nature and function of racial disparate outcomes in multiracial, high-performing districts is one component of this study.

A second significance of this project resides in its applicability to the specific context, history, politics, and racial climate of Ithaca schools. Geoffrey Walford (2005) states, “The fact that we do not name a site gives the findings of the research a spurious generalizability. If we attempt to conceal details about a school, it becomes a more ‘general’ place—a school that ‘could be any school,’ a school is just one example of many” (p. 90). While some generalizability will be a logical consequence of this project, addressing the specificity of a localized crisis is another key aspect. Michael Apple (2003) reminds us that too many educational theorists forget “the realities of real institutions in real communities in real struggles” (p. 108). As such, a significance of this project is the exploration of black students’ experiences and any

²⁰ Ithaca is not a traditional suburban community in terms of being adjacent to a major metropolitan area. However, the U.S. Census Bureau identifies Ithaca as a *metropolitan statistical area*, and beyond population and racial/ethnic demographics, the community shares numerous characteristics with other suburban schools.

resulting policies that would work toward the *elimination of race as a predictor of academic success* in Ithaca schools.

This applicability of research on a localized level is wholly consistent with Afrocentric research methodologies. Such methodologies profess that “knowledge can never be produced for the sake of it” (Mazama, 2001, p. 392). In other words, the goal of all research should be the concrete applications of any findings. While the research methodology is explored in greater depth throughout Chapter 3, it is the prospect of exploring a real community with a real struggle with real students that gives importance to this project.

Clarification of Language

In making an argument against the use of the term *race relations* Stephen Steinberg writes (2001),

Putting the wrong name on a problem is worse than having no name at all. In the latter instance, one is at least open to filling the conceptual void. In the first instance, however, words lead us down a blind alley. They divert us from the facets of the problem that should command our attention . . . they lead to remedies that are ineffectual or worse. (para. 4)

Steinberg states that social scientists should employ the term *racial oppression* if we are interested in legitimately fostering social change. The term *race relations*, according to Steinberg’s argument, conceals the truthful and harmful interactions between racial groups. Otherwise, Steinberg (2001) states, “We measure—with meticulous care—but we measure the wrong things” (para. 9). While Steinberg was not making a direct reference to educational policy, his examination of words demonstrates the connection between language and policy. Steinberg argues that social scientists repeatedly mismeasure and, as a result, misidentify problems as well as solutions. Educational research is not exempt from the *mismeasure* hypothesis. Similar

to Steinberg's deconstruction of *race relations*, the oft-quoted term *achievement gap* is in need of some examination.

Earliest references to the term *achievement gap* as a label describing racial differences in educational outcomes appear in the mid-1960s (Gowan & Demos, 1967). It is important to note that these references appear only after the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In other words, under the legal doctrine of *separate but unequal*, black students were not measured against their white counterparts. However, the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—and the subsequent Coleman Report—ushered in a new era of racial thinking. This new racial thinking can be best exemplified by the creation of another racialized phenomenon: the *model minority myth* (Thrupkaew, 2002). The *U.S. News and World Report*'s famous article "Success Story of One Minority in the United States"²¹ and the *New York Times*'s "Success Story, Japanese American Style" were both published in 1966 and both helped to shift the racial paradigm.²²

In short, the *model minority myth* "took hold at a sensitive point in U.S. history" (Thrupkaew, 2002, p. 38). Wu states that in the face of violent black-white racial tensions [Rochester, 1964; Harlem, 1964; Philadelphia, 1964; Watts, 1965; Cleveland, 1966; Omaha, 1966; Newark, 1967; Detroit, 1967; and Chicago, 1968], the new racial ideology needed to promote stories that Asians' "good fortune flows from individual self-reliance and community self-sufficiency; not civil-rights activism or government welfare benefits" (Wu, 2001, p. 44). After all, Asian Americans were the *model* only in comparison to their *problem* minority sistren and brethren. For Wu, the myth creation was a *race relations* failure. It did not matter whether this stereotype hurt Asian Americans or concealed the reality for many Southeast Asian descendants.

²¹ "Success Story of One Minority in the United States" (1966, December 26). *U.S. News and World Report*.

²² Pettersen, W. (1966, January 9). Success Story, Japanese-American Style. *New York Times*.

The *model minority* stereotype needed to tell “a reassuring story about our society working” (Thrupkaew, 2002, p. 38). It is against this historical juncture—and the intentional racial/racist comparisons—that we begin to see references to a gap between the academic achievement of black students and white students.

Within this context, the racialization and modern use of the term *achievement gap* completes two simultaneous tasks. First, it is an example of *assumptive language*. Assumptive language is a strategy taught in some real estate and sales seminars. The goal is to assume—or predetermine—the outcome by facilitating a transfer of ownership. The label of *achievement gap* is highly effective in transferring ownership onto black students.

To illustrate this point, employing the term *education gap* directs our focus to the function of education. Similarly, employing the term *teaching gap* directs our focus to the role of teachers. Employing the term *achievement gap*, however, directs our focus to black students. Implicit in this construction is the idea that the gap exists because black students have not achieved. Perry (2003) writes,

The conversation about African-American achievement is problematic because it fails to begin with a careful examination of all aspects of the school, with an eye toward understanding *how* the school’s day-to-day practices participate in the creation of underachievement. As a grandparent of a Head Start student in rural Louisiana observed years ago, “*If the corn don’t grow, nobody don’t ask what’s wrong with the corn.*” We need to examine how race affects the reproduction of inequality in an allegedly open and integrated setting. (p. 9)

As a result, and as shall be discussed later, the underlying assumption of the *achievement gap* reinforces deficit model approaches. With rare exception, we focus on remedies that would correct supposed deficiencies in black students.

In the U.S., attempts to document the deficiency of black folks have a tortured history (Black, 2003; Gould, 1996; Harding, 1993). Today, educational researchers continue to study the deficiency of black students in terms of language skills (Mazano,

2003), behavior (Downey & Pribesh, 2004), and overall educability (Harry & Klingner, 2007). In one of the more infamous examples of deficit model approaches, Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein (1994) have argued that black students possess an inherent intellectual deficiency.

Still, the deficit model approach that garners the most attention revolves around the supposed cultural deficiencies of black students (McMillan, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). At times, cultural deficiency arguments are cloaked in *culture of poverty* stereotypes or sweeping attacks on hip-hop culture. These deficit model approaches assume that differences in achievement are “associated with students (and their families and communities), not the schools they attend” (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005, p. 2023). In the end, there is no need to fix schools, to transform teaching, nor to challenge larger societal structures.

Second, the term *achievement gap* places white, and sometimes Asian, students as the measure—as the goal. The gap simply becomes the statistical difference in standardized test scores between black/brown students and their white/Asian counterparts. The goal may be to close the gap—but these remedies simply attempt to make black students more like their white peers (Tough, 2006). Or, as Zora Neale Hurston stated in her 1955 letter denouncing the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision,

I regard the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court as insulting rather than honoring my race. Since the days of the never-to-be-sufficiently-deplored Reconstruction, there has been current the belief that there is no greater delight to Negroes than physical association with whites. *The doctrine of the white mare*. Those familiar with the habits of mules are aware that any mule, if not restrained, will automatically follow a white mare. Dishonest mule traders made money out of this knowledge in the old days. (quoted in Fine, Bloom, Burns, Chajet, Guishard, & Payne et al., 2005, p. 496)

If we reconsider Steinberg’s (2001) analysis, employing the wrong name will “lead to remedies that are ineffectual or worse” (para 4). At present, this project does

not suggest an alternative term. Michelle Fine and her colleagues argue that we should seek a term that shifts the focus from “youth who *lack*” onto “systems that *deny*” (Fine et al., 2005, p. 501). As such, the authors offer *opportunity gap* as a replacement term. But more important than suggesting an alternative for this phenomenon, I hope the voice of the students will best describe their educational experiences. Whether policy folks call it a *teaching gap*, an *educational failure*, or a *crisis*, the students in this research project are in the best position to describe their realities. A time will come when a label that captures this experience will be of tremendous help, much like Steinberg’s delineations of *racial oppression*. Until then, we know that statistical gaps alone tell a partial story.

Naming Black Americans

While responding to questions about the best labels for black folks, the fiery 19th-century abolitionist, Henry Highland Garnett, once stated,

How unprofitable it is for us to spend our golden moments in long and solemn debates upon the question whether we shall be called “African,” “Colored American,” or “Africo Americans,” or “blacks” . . . The question should be, my friends, shall we arise and act like men, and cast off this terrible yoke. (quoted in Kennedy, 2004/2005, p. 72)

Even though Garnett argues that we should not waste time debating appropriate terms, the fact that so many have been occupied by group-identification labels indicates that it is important to at least clarify why certain terms are employed. In fact, the use of *black* as the descriptor of choice is directly connected to the theoretical underpinnings and ultimate objectives of this project.

There is no shortage of debate or literature addressing the names and labels applied to darker-skin descendants of Africa in the United States (Asim, 2007; Baugh, 1991; Crémieux, 2001; DuBois, 1928; Kennedy, 2004/2005; Martin, 1991; Smith,

1992). In discussing black Americans' preference of self-identification labels, Sigelman, Tuch, and Martin (2005) begin their article by stating, "The collective term that members of a group use to refer to themselves can provide interesting clues about the group's status in society and its strategy for advancement" (p. 429).

In his song, "For Women," itself an homage to Nina Simone's homonymously entitled "Four Women," Talib Kweli attempts to capture the various labels applied to black folks. Kweli (2000) raps:

*She lived from nigger, to colored, to Negro, to black,
To afro-, then African American and right back to nigga.
You figure she'd be bitter in the twilight
But she alright, cuz she done seen the circle of life.*²³

Kweli's articulation of the changing labels is an important phenomenon in understanding four centuries of black American political, social, and economic movements.

Early U.S. history indicates that black folks arriving in the Americas commonly referred to themselves as *African*. We find the clearest evidence of this in the naming of organizations and churches: New York City's *African* Free School established in 1787 and Ithaca's St. James *African* Methodist Episcopal Church established in 1833 serve as two examples. The shift from *African* to *Colored* was slow and not fully complete until the time black folks won their emancipation.

One reason for the shift from *African* to *Colored* could have been an attempt to distinguish between first-generation arrivals and other enslaved black folks who had been born in the United States. Unlike *African*, the new term was flexible enough to include a growing number of interracial, biracial, and mixed-race folks (Crémieux, 2001; Smith, 1992) while also distinguishing new arrivals. Beyond the three-fifths

²³ "For Women" is a hidden track from Talib Kweli's 2000 release of the album *Reflection Eternal*. Rawkus Records.

formula to compromise African humanity,²⁴ the framers of the U.S. Constitution set 1808 as the earliest date Congress could ban human trafficking. In other words, Congress banned itself from interfering with the enslavement trade and the United States experienced a steady influx of African enslaved peoples well into the mid-19th century.

Colored may have also been the term preferred by white folks, as it simplified the creation of the binary paradigm. In colonial America, citizenship, property rights, and legal protections were restricted to those classified as free white people. And as Haney-López (1996) states, white people were “those with no known African or other non-White ancestry” (p. 23). The *one-drop rule* functioned to classify all others as nonwhite. Africans, Asians, and Indians—including those with any discernable/presumed African, Asian, and Indian ancestry—were branded as *Colored* and excluded.

David Walker’s political manifesto, *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the United States*, published in 1829, gives some idea of how long the label has been in use. W. E. B. DuBois also employs the term in his creation of the National Advancement of *Colored* People (NAACP) in 1910. Even the 1923 short-lived black newspaper in Ithaca was “published in the interest of *Colored* people.”²⁵ The term *Colored* is also etched into the national psyche via Jim Crow signs and statutes. Still, Marcus Garvey’s rise and the creation of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 may reveal that not all willingly accepted the *Colored* label.

Some argue that the shift originates in “the apprehension that ‘colored’ constitutes an attempted linguistic dilution of blackness” (Kennedy, 2004/2005, p. 75). It is possible that Garvey and others purposely sought a term that was more affirming of blackness, and “by the 1950s the dominant position of ‘Negro’ was secure” (Smith,

²⁴ See original wording of Article I, Section 2 in the United States Constitution (1789).

²⁵ *The Monitor* (1923, April). Ithaca, NY.

1992, p. 499). Power struggles over capitalization notwithstanding (Wachal, 2000), it was not long before *Negro* also lost its political/radical sway. Where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., used the label *Negro*, Malcolm X would frequently be heard saying, *so-called Negro* (Kaplan, 1969).

There is also no doubt that the jettisoning of the label *Negro* was actively encouraged by the racial tumult of the 1960s. Richard Moore's (1960) influential work, *The Name "Negro": Its Origin and Evil Use*, helped expedite the demise of *Negro* as a primary identification. Similar to Henry Highland Garnett, Moore did not see any value in engaging in semantic debates. He believed his time was better spent channeling "all our energies on improving our condition" (Moore, 1960, p. 33). However, Moore (1960) quickly adds,

I subsequently discovered that view to be very superficial, since that view leaves out of account the working of the human mind through the association of ideas; so that when a name which has been connected with images and other associations in the human mind arises in consciousness, it immediately calls forth reactions which the name is associated. (p. 33)

In many respects, James Brown's 1968, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" completes the rejection of the word *Negro*. Additionally, the rise of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, with *Black Power* and *Black Pride* and *Black is Beautiful* mantras in tow, began to re/define a generation. In short order, *black* had become the preferred—and militant—substitute for *Negro*. Its use embodied another era of struggle toward liberation.

It is also important to heed the words of the historian John Henrik Clarke. Clarke (1996), in the film *A Great and Mighty Walk*, cautioned against the use of *black* as a primary identification: "Black describes what you look like, it does not tell you where you come from." Even Malcolm understood this when he asked for someone to help him locate *Negroland* (Moore, 1960).

Today, *black* shares an equal space with *African American*. In fact, polling suggests preference is “split almost evenly between the two terms” (Sigelman et al., 2005, p. 434). *African American* is the term found throughout most print and television media. Randal Kennedy (2004/2005) argues that recorded usage dates back at least a century, but also marks 1988 as the year when the larger society started to employ the label in organized fashion.

Thus, when Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign demanded that news organizations and newspapers begin using the term *African American*, he “provided the spark that ignited a national linguistic debate” (Baugh, 1991, p. 142). Martin (1991) claims the shift in labels, as well as Jackson’s push, was reflective of a movement that encouraged “African Americans to identify and ally with other exploited masses in a nonracial united front” (p. 96). Martin (1991) connects the changing label to the quest for reparations and the solidarity of the South African anti-Apartheid and Black Consciousness movements.

Whether African, Negro, Colored, Black, or African American, the use and ubiquity of *nigger* warrants brief comment. While *nigger* has a long and violent past, hip-hop has been at the center of recent usage debates. Within some genres of hip-hop culture, there has been an attempt to resignify *nigger* as a label of self-identification. This has been attempted by employing inventive spelling (i.e., from *nigger* to *nigga*) and definitions. Even while Tupac Shakur stated that *nigga* was an acronym for “never ignorant, getting goals accomplished,” resignifying the word in a meaningful context seems a daunting task. Jabari Asim writes, “the word ‘nigger’ serves primarily—even in its contemporary ‘friendlier’ usage—as a linguistic extension of white supremacy, the most potent part of a language of oppression that has changed over time from overt to coded” (Asim, 2007, p. 4). *Nigger* and *nigga* remain widely contentious. The media frenzy around actor Michael Richards’s comedy club meltdown, or comedian Damon

Wayans's unsuccessfully attempt to copyright *nigger*, or Nasir 'NaS' Jones's plan to title his album *Nigger*, only to have it censored, all indicate the controversy will not be quieted any time soon.

To come full circle, it is not uncommon for *black* folks—particularly younger generations—to refer to themselves as *African* or *Afrikans*. One can cite *Let's Get Free* (2001), the first album from the hip-hop group Dead Prez. The introductory track is entitled "I'm a African," with a chorus that repeats: "*I'm a African, I'm a African, And I know what's happenin'!*"

At the core, debates over labels are always struggles for power and self-determination. As Baugh (1991) states, the "linguistic paradox is a shadow of long-standing racial and economic disenfranchisement." For our purposes, the label *African American* is not appropriate or accurate. Malcolm X claimed, "If you call yourself 'white,' why should I not call myself 'black'? . . . No matter how dark or how light we are, we call ourselves 'black' . . . and we don't feel we have to make apologies about it" (quoted in Kaplan, 1969, p. 169). In fact, in part because of Malcolm's influence, *black* has historically been associated with "youth, unity, militancy and pride" (Martin, 1991, p. 92). But most importantly, while all participants are *black*, not all participants are African American.

In recognition of these nuances and with an understanding of the historic progression, this project will proceed with *black* as the primary label/descriptor. We can look to a 1928 exchange in *The Crisis* to offer a final word on this topic. The mouthpiece of the NAACP published a letter by high school student Roland Garnett. Young Mr. Garnett questioned why *The Crisis*, a magazine whose mission was the uplift of a people, would employ the word *Negro*. He (1928) wrote, "The most piercing thing that hurts me in this February CRISIS, which forced me to write, was

the notice that called the natives of Africa, ‘Negroes,’ instead of calling them ‘Africans,’ or ‘natives.’” DuBois responded,

Get this then, Roland, and get it straight even if it pierces your soul: a Negro by any other name would be just as black and just as white; just as ashamed of himself and just as shamed by others, as today. It is not the name—it’s the Thing that counts. Come on, Kid, let’s go get the Thing!²⁶

Outline of Remaining Chapters

There are seven remaining chapters to this project. Chapter 2 offers a literature review on black students and black education on a national level. Particular attention is paid to the role of education during the time of enslavement and Reconstruction. This chapter also examines social reproduction and cultural capital theories as more recent explanations for educational disparities. Chapter 3 examines Afrocentricity. The common assumptions are discussed and contextualized for use in this study. Chapter 4 outlines the project’s research methodology, research design, and connections between Afrocentric and qualitative research methodologies. Chapter 5 introduces the interview participants as well as presents the results of the student interviews. Chapter 6 describes the sociohistoric context for the student interviews and forthcoming policy recommendations. This includes a transcribed lecture on the *timeloop* of black students in Ithaca, NY. Finally, Chapter 7 details the policy recommendations, and Chapter 8 offers concluding words.

²⁶ DuBois, W. E. B. (1928, March). The Name “Negro.” The Crisis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*How do you know where I'm at, if you don't know where I've been?
Understand where I'm coming from?*

—Grady Wilson, from the TV sitcom *Sanford and Son*

Whether *literacy as freedom* during enslavement, the establishment of freedom schools during the Civil Rights era, or the Uhuru schools today, education and liberation have a deeply rooted connection in black narratives. Teresa Perry (2003) writes that some ask, “Why work hard at school, or anything else for that matter, if these activities are not inextricably linked to and address one’s status as a member of a historically oppressed people?” (p. 19). Her reading of black narratives offers the following answer:

Read and write yourself into freedom! Read and write to assert your identity as a human! Read and write as an act of resistance, as a political act, for racial uplift, so you can lead your people well in the struggle for liberation! (p. 19)

Despite black America’s persistent faith in education, too infrequently have educational inputs resulted in large-scale liberatory outcomes. In fact, we can find consistent references to this duality throughout U.S. history. Writers from David Walker (1829) to Frederick Douglass (1845) to Harriet Jacobs (1861) have documented the critical need for black education. Educational activists from W. E. B. DuBois (1903) to Carter G. Woodson (1933) to Mary McCloud Bethune (1938) have demanded better educational institutions. And educational scholars from Asa Hilliard, III (1995) to Geneva Gay (2000) to William Watkins (2001) have addressed the need for radical educational reform. Time after time, in history and literature, demands for black education have remained an essential, if not concurrently dangerous, polemic in the United States.

Early Origins (1619–1800)

The genesis of educating black folks in the United States is firmly rooted in the institutions of slavery and servitude (Bond, 1966; Clift, 1962; Webber, 1978; Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 1919/1999). It should be noted that globally, black people have created and attended *institutions of learning* for thousands of years (Diop, 1974; Diop, Salemonson, & De Jager, 1991). Bekerie (1997) writes that Egyptian monuments suggest the existence of African writing systems that are at least 3000 years old and writes, “The Ethiopian educational system is, perhaps, the oldest and most enduring example of an indigenous African-centered education system” (p. 109). The Alexandria Library and Museum in Egypt, once considered the world’s largest collection of volumes, was founded in the third century B.C.E. Additionally, Sankore Mosque and University has origins during the 14th century C.E. These institutions of learning are notable not only for their sheer size and importance but also because they illustrate the long history of formal academic training within Africa. From Timbuktu to Dakar, African people have created “extremely sophisticated and effective systems of education” (Hilliard, 2001, p. ix). Despite the universal antiquity of learning, African people’s forced arrival in the Americas issued the beginning of a new educational era (Spring, 2001). Low (1982) puts forth the argument quite simply, “The story of the American education of the Negro begins with the modern African slave trade” (p. 27).

The most commonly cited date for the arrival of the first African people on U.S. soil is 1619 (Asante, 1995). The arrival of 20 African men commissioned to be indentured servants in the colony of Jamestown would soon give way to racial, chattel slavery (Davis, 2006). Crudely stated, enslavers needed a way to communicate with their new “labor” pool. Carter G. Woodson (1919/1998) writes,

Brought from the African wilds to constitute the laboring class of pioneering society in the new world, the heathen slaves had to be trained to meet the needs of their environment. It required little argument to convince intelligent masters

that slaves who had some conception of modern civilization and understood the language of their owners would be more valuable than rude men with whom one could not communicate. (p. 1)

Thus, at its basic level, the education of black students originated as a means for the communication of labor demands (Woodson, 1919/1998; Webber, 1978). Or, stated differently, the earliest notions of teaching English literacy were connected to facilitating more efficient economic exploitation.

This is not to say that other factors were not at play during the earliest years. In the United States, formal schools for black children are recorded as early as 1704 (Morgan, 1995). African Free schools, Quaker schools, and other institutionalized places of learning sparsely populated the American colonies (Clift, 1962; Morgan, 1995; Woodson, 1919/1998). In nearly every instance, these early schools were directly linked to religious instruction, and religious literacy was generally accepted for all colonial inhabitants—regardless of race or class (Anderson, 1988). Webber (1978) posits, “arguments which appealed to the planter’s sense of moral duty drew their strength from the recognition that blacks, however biologically and culturally inferior, were members of the human race possessing souls in need of eternal salvation” (p. 44).

While *education for liberation* was a model for black folks trying to escape enslavement, *education for salvation* was the common colonial model for white and black folks alike (Kaestle, 1983). This is best evidenced by the first recorded legislative policy to require the creation of public schools at public expense. Massachusetts’s “Old Deluder Satan Law of 1647” (Spring, 1997, p. 8) required locales to ensure their youth were knowledgeable in the scriptures and well versed in the Puritan/Protestant ethic (Kaestle, 1983; Spring, 1997; Webber, 1978). As a result, the earliest stages include a moral rationale for educating enslaved Africans beyond economic incentives.

The decentralized structure of education has led a few scholars to look more fondly upon this period (Webber, 1978). Schools in the United States had not yet been institutionalized. Woodson (1919/1998) argues that despite the sporadic nature and competing rationales for educating black folks in the 18th century, “It was the day of better beginnings” (p. 57). Indeed, throughout the *diaspora* a significant number of enslaved and emancipated African people became literate in European languages (Gomez, 2006). Yet, the zeal and seriousness with which black folks regarded their education did not go unnoticed. As John Henrik Clarke (1998) reminds us in a forward to Carter G. Woodson’s *The Education of the Negro*, black people “were not brought to the United states or so-called New World to be educated.” Rather, Clarke states, “We were brought as part of a massive labor supply” (p. ix).

During the late 18th century, it was quickly becoming apparent to the slavocracy that black education and black enslavement could not coexist. The ability to read newspapers, law notices, labor contracts and, maybe most important, abolitionist literature posed a serious threat to the American slave economy (Spring, 2001). While this period strengthened the belief in education as a path toward liberation (Douglass 1845; Walker, 1829), it also informed white enslavers to regard education as a threat. Education could liberate or oppress. And it was this liberation/oppression binary that caused Woodson (1919/1998) to write, “[t]he same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth while, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other people” (p. xiii).

Freedom Uprisings (1801–1865)

The early-19th-century freedom movements, ushered in by the Haitian Revolution in 1804, sent shockwaves throughout the Western hemisphere (Davis, 2006). Reverberative resurrections occurred in Jamaica, Brazil, Cuba, the United States, and elsewhere (Davis, 2006). In fact, rebellions were documented in every place racial slavery was practiced. The United States experienced immeasurable acts of resistance: Gabriel Prosser's attempted insurrection in 1800, the Fort Blount Revolt in 1816, Denmark Vessey's uprising in 1822, Nat Turner's revolt in 1831, mutinies on the *Amistad* in 1839 as well as the Creole in 1841, and others added to the massive undercurrent of educational fright (Morgan, 1995; Woodson, 1919/1998). In response to the increasing number of enslavement uprisings, Southern states began actively and aggressively eliminating all access to black education during the years between 1800 and 1840 (Morgan, 1995; Spring, 2001; Woodson, 1919/1998).

Of all the 19th-century enslavement uprisings, however, Nat Turner's revolt had the greatest impact on shifting national educational policy (Morgan, 1995; Woodson, 1919/1998). Whether white folks blamed Turner's actions on religious instruction (Webber, 1978) or on the influence of David Walker's 1829 manifesto (Woodson, 1919/1998), the effect remained the same. Webber (1978) writes, "A primary operating principal of most plantations, especially after the Nat Turner revolt and as abolition fever rose in the North, was to keep its slaves as ignorant as possible about the world beyond the confines of the home plantation" (p. 27). From Virginia to Delaware to Georgia to Mississippi, "*black* codes were devised, curtailing the movements of Negroes, forbidding the teaching of Negroes" (Clift, 1962, p. 36). In short, Nat Turner's rebellion created a litany of "reactionary legislation" (Woodson, 1919/1998, p. 100), and curtailing educational access was quickly deemed necessary "as a means of preventing further insurrections" (Morgan, 1995, p. 50).

Woodson (1919/1998) comments,

When this enlightenment became productive of such disorders that slaveholders lived in eternal dread of servile insurrection, southern states adopted the thoroughly reactionary policy of making the education of Negroes impossible. (p. 5)

The denial of educational access as a response to the freedom uprisings remained consistent with the United States' greed and appetite for subservience. In general, white slaveholders "believed slaves could not be enlightened without developing in them a longing for liberty" (Woodson, 1919/1998, p. 1).

Frederick Douglass (1845) demonstrates that this idea was widely held among the white land-owning and slave-owning classes. Douglass recalls his enslaver's strong admonishment after catching him in the middle of a literacy lesson. Douglass's owner declared, "If you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave" (Douglass, 1845, p. 20). Douglass quickly added, "From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom" (p. 20).

There was good reason to see education as antithetical to the goals of enslavement. Despite the threat of physical harm, "literally at the risk of life and limb" (Spring, 1997, p. 85), roughly 5% of black folks were literate by the start of the Civil War (Bond, 1966; Spring, 2001). Anderson (1988) quotes Ferebe Rogers, who spoke of her husband, Enoch Golden. Rogers recalls, "On his dyin' bed he said he been de death o' many a nigger 'cause he taught so many to read and write" (p. 17). After all, "education is by derivation and in fact a drawing out of human powers" (DuBois, 2001, p. 25). As history instructs, this was not something the U.S. slavocracy supported.

Reconstruction (1865–1895)

Despite general denials and policies to make education unattainable, the end of the Civil War brought the potential for new beginnings. Anderson highlights that black folks' enthusiasm reflects a complex understanding of education's potential. He writes,

Their thinking on these questions indicated virtually no illusions about the power of schooling to ameliorate fundamental economic inequalities. It reflected their belief that education could help raise the freed people to an appreciation of their historic responsibility to develop a better society and that any significant reorganization of the southern political economy was indissolubly linked to their education in the principles, duties, and obligations appropriate to a democratic social order. (Anderson, 1988, p. 28)

The Reconstruction era not only brought an eagerness to obtain literacy, it accelerated a shift in educational ideology. As stated by Clift (1962),

The older antebellum idea that any Negro education was questionable gave way to the newer idea that the Negro might be educated, even at nominal public expense, if his education remained under control of persons who would not permit the system to endanger white supremacy or allow the Negro to forget his "place." (p. 38)

In other words, lessons learned about the power and promise of education indicated that a new educational approach could be extremely useful. Though "suggestions ranged from shipping all blacks back to Africa, to making them immediate and full citizens, to leaving them to tender mercy of the South" (Spivey, 1978, p. 16), education became the solution to the so-called *Negro Problem* (Meier, 1969, p. vi). Watkins (2001) writes that education was waged as "the central political weapon by which blacks would be introduced and inducted into American's social organization" (p. 181).

As with the preceding era, the educational planning post-Reconstruction was directly linked to a changing economy (Bond, 1966). The antebellum

conceptualization was being cultivated and conditioned upon the economic and political desires of the white architects (Spivey, 1978; Watkins, 2001, Woodson, 1933/2000). In multiple ways, Hampton University would serve as the ultimate example of the new national, educational policy.

There is no doubt that Hampton receives an unfair amount of criticism and not nearly enough recognition for its role in raising black education as a national issue (Bond, 1966; Anderson, 1988). In fact, industrial schools received wide support throughout Southern and Northern spheres and greatly increased educational access. Beyond training in industrial skills, these schools taught reading, writing, and a form of self-sufficiency. However, the Hampton model was also premised on the idea that black folks should not concern themselves with political agitation (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1903/1999).

Watkins (2001) also writes that “The Hampton idea was about much more than education. It was about nation building. It was about carefully situating the newly freed Black in a new sociopolitical and economic order” (p. 43). To borrow the title of Donald Spivey’s (1978) book, the Hampton model was *Schooling for the New Slavery*. The founder of Hampton, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, believed that “[t]he negro’s deficiencies of character are worse for him and for the world than his mere ignorance” (quoted in Spivey, 1978, p. 19). Based on racist assumptions, the Hampton model sought to teach “the ‘right’ ideas of citizenship, the duties of laborers and the history of race development” (Anderson, 1988, p. 51). Armstrong understood his moment in time and “understood that domination and subjugation of a people must take on new forms” (Watkins, 2001, p. 60).

Watkins (2001) has further postulated that during this time General Armstrong had plenty of company. In fact, nearly all of the white architects sought an education for black students that ensured racial stratification. Speaking on the status of black

people, J. L. M. Curry stated, “We are tethered to the lowest stratum of society, and if we don’t lift it up, it will drag us down to the nethermost hell of poverty and degradation” (quoted in Spivey, 1978, p. 175).

In addition to the white architects, no one was more influential in constructing educational policy than Booker T. Washington. Washington, a Hampton graduate and Armstrong protégé, replicated the industrial ideology into his founding of the Normal School for Colored Teachers—otherwise known as Tuskegee University. Some argue that “Washington and Tuskegee were Armstrong and Hampton in black face” (Anderson, 1988, p. 72). Together, Hampton and Tuskegee became the leading models for the next century, and each garnered wide financial, public, and political support.

Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Compromise speech, along with the famous “Cast down your buckets where you are” sound clip, became the new mantra for industrial education (found in DuBois & Gates, 1999). His attempt for self-determination has been vilified throughout history, and the debates between Washington and DuBois are frequently reduced to oversimplifications. To his critics, Washington was naïve and misguided. After delivering his (in)famous *Atlanta Compromise* speech, Washington was broadly labeled as an accommodationist who lacked a global understanding of human relations (Spivey, 1978). DuBois would argue, “every energy is being used to put black men back into slavery and Mr. Washington is leading the way backward” (Anderson, 1988, p. 107). To his supporters, Washington was a realist trying to directly impact the material reality of his people (Bond, 1933). Asante (1988) writes, “For Washington, economic independence was not an ideology; it was a practical philosophy” (p. 9).

The idea of economic self-preservation would become the cornerstone of black nationalist organizations throughout the 20th century. Self-discipline, efficiency, and

self-reliance were Washingtonian staples and would be revived by the Nation of Islam as well as the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. To this end, Washington stated,

The Negro in the South works and works hard; but too often his ignorance and lack of skill causes him to do his work in the most costly and shiftless manner, and this keeps him near the bottom of the ladder in the economic world.
(Washington, 1898, p. 371)

Washington worked tirelessly to broaden educational access. Still, he may have underestimated the role of white resistance and overestimated the possibility of industrial education to bring black folks *up from slavery*. Despite its successes in the expansion of schooling, the Normal School for Colored Teachers at Tuskegee has an origin that sought to normalize political disengagement.

The embrace of industrial education as a national model did not come without resistance. Spivey (1978) quotes William Roscoe Davis as saying, “If Negroes don’t get any better education than Armstrong is giving them, they may as well have stayed in slavery” (p. 37). In fact, Anderson (1988) indicates there was clear discomfort from black community members regarding the new educational options being offered. Black leaders repeatedly “discouraged the development of more Hamptons and Tuskegees” (Anderson, 1988, p. 109). Morris and Morris (2002) demonstrates that there were calls for schools that incorporated “the philosophy of W.E.B. DuBois with classical or liberal studies rather than the Hampton-Tuskegee industrial model perfected by Booker T. Washington” (p. 5). With determined efforts and a clear understanding of pedagogy, black people not only demanded greater educational access but also better schools.

This era has left a debilitating educational legacy, and the range of scholarship indicates that any discussion of today’s crisis must begin with the educational pedagogies devised during this reconstructive period (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1966; DuBois, 2001; Spring, 2001; Watkins, 2001; Webber, 1978). For nearly 100 years,

from 1865 until the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a segregated industrial model dominated the education of black folks. As described by Anderson (1988),

The development of these county industrial schools rested on the assumption that good academic education was dysfunctional for the world in which Black children were compelled to live. This conception of the Black education was reflected in the structure and the content of the county training schools and pushed them heavily toward an emphasis on work and social adjustment. The intended purpose of these schools was to make Black children think and feel that traditional, high quality academic education was incongruent with their station in life. (p. 147)

In short, black yearnings for education, along with a liberal white philanthropy, brought about one of the most formative time periods in black education (Anderson, 1988; Bond, 1966; Spivey, 1978; Watkins, 2001).

Separate but Unequal (1896–1954)

The reconstruction of educational ideology following the Civil War was greatly assisted by a reinforcement of the color line. Only a year after Booker T. Washington's *Atlanta Compromise Speech*, the Supreme Court decided the monumental case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Despite the 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional amendments, the doctrine of *separate and unequal* was now supreme. Throughout the nation, the effectiveness and pervasiveness of Black Codes and Jim Crow segregation were felt acutely in schools.

Legal challenges to segregation and segregated schools have a long history in the United States (Cottrol, Diamond, & Ware, 2003; Mondale, 2001). In 1848, Robert Morris, one of the first black lawyers in the United States, helped to argue the case of *Sarah Roberts v. City of Boston*. The case presented the court with the question of whether legally mandated school segregation violated Massachusetts's constitutional declaration of "all men created equal" (Cottrol et al., 2003, p. 16). According to the legal proceedings, the plaintiffs argued that separate schools created "a feeling of

degradation in the blacks and of prejudice and uncharitableness in the whites” (Cotroll et al., 2003, p. 89). The court rejected both of these contentions, stating, “This prejudice, if it exists, is not created by law and probably cannot be changed by law” (Bell, 2004, p. 89).

Fifty years later, the U.S. Supreme Court would borrow Massachusetts’s legal reasoning in deciding the national doctrine of *separate but equal*. In the majority decision for *Plessey v. Ferguson*, Justice Brown writes,

We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it. (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 [1896])

Thus, the same rationale used to enforce segregated schools now codified segregation as a legal doctrine and social reality. *Plessey v. Ferguson* not only sought to segregate life by race, it brought “the law into a dismal harmony with the nations’ view of race in life” (Bell, 2004, p. 11).

The General Education Board (GEB), established only a couple years after the *Plessy* case, further ensured that separate schools would continue well into the 20th century (Watkins, 2001). While it was recognized that controlling the education of black students could ultimately be profitable, it was equally important to control how much money went into school programs. Bond (1966) argues that educational planning created a *funding gap* by keeping “expenditures for Negro schools down to a bare pittance” (p. 257). Spivey quotes William Baldwin, the GEB’s first president, as stating, “The potential economic value of the Negro population properly educated is infinite and incalculable” (Spivey, 1978, p. 93). The goal, yet again, was to more efficiently turn a profit.

A growing number of scholars see the segregation era as an extremely problematic, but not necessarily unhealthy, system of black education (Milner & Howard, 2004; Siddle Walker, 1996). Morris and Morris (2002) write, “[D]espite the lack of financial resources to adequately maintain the physical plant and to purchase books, supplies, and equipment needed for the academic program, many students eagerly looked forward to attending their classes each day for 12 years of schooling” (p. 6). In fact, there are a number of positive attributes that can be gleaned from Jim Crow-era schools.

If one rejects the “assumed unilateral inferiority” (Siddle Walker, 2000, p. 254) of education for black students during segregation era, segregated black schools became a place of strength. During this era, illiteracy decreased sharply and educational attainment increased equally as much (Siddle Walker, 2000). The eagerness to attend schools most likely resulted from the sense of community that was present during the segregation era (Milner & Howard, 2004). Most segregated schools for black folks maintained high expectations, employed a challenging curriculum connected to students’ lives, were staffed by highly proficient teachers, built a sense of caring, and reflected the values and aspirations of the larger community (Hale, 2001; Milner & Howard, 2004; Morris & Morris, 2002; Walker, 2000).

Despite the inequality in funding, structures, and resources, segregated schools did not necessarily lack in terms of the quality of education they provided. Milner and Howard (2004) write, “If we are to think seriously about predominately black schools for black students, we must investigate the essence of what made the schools work in the past and use those insights as a foundation to structure schools presently” (p. 295). It may come as a surprise to some that many of the successful qualities found in segregated black schools are frequently offered as today’s solutions.

Nonetheless, it is also clear that segregation was an attempt to keep black people, and black children, regulated to a second-class citizenry. As Lawrence (1980) states, “segregation’s only purpose is to stigmatize and subordinate” (p. 51). Though segregated schools could provide a nurturing learning environment, larger social mobility was denied. Bond (1966) writes,

The Negro child is neglected and forgotten by the conscience of administrative officials and of the ordinary citizen. When prejudice, hatred and actual discrimination are added to the fearful social barriers, which stand in the way of fulfillment for the Negro child, it is apparent that the Negro children of American constitute its most unfortunate class. (p. 303)

Or, as Bell (2004) states, “segregation was the name, but domination was the game” (p. 13).

Brown v. Board of Education I (1954) and Brown v. Board of Education II (1955)

At their core, the *Brown* decisions are widely celebrated because many believed they would bring the end of “American Apartheid” (Caldas & Bankston, 2005, p. 25). In reality, the school desegregation cases were one of many attempts to resist forced and legalized segregation. Protests, walkouts, and boycotts had long been employed as freedom-fighting tactics in various communities. Additionally, the NAACP had been fighting legal battles for at least three decades and, some argue, the constant chipping away had finally resulted in a Supreme Court “victory” (Cottrol et al., 2003). Bell (2004) claims, “While Blacks had been petitioning the courts for decades to find segregation unconstitutional, by 1954 a fortuitous symmetry existed between what blacks sought and what the nation needed” (p. 57).

For Bell, *interest convergence* is the argument that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites” (Bell, 1980, p. 523). The reconstruction era of education as well as

the *Brown v. Board* decisions are offered as two possible convergences. In the latter instance, international embarrassment and anti-Communist posturing can help to explain the *Brown* decisions. According to Ladson-Billings (2004), “The Brown case could be positioned as serving White interests—improving the national image, quelling racial unrest, and stimulating the economy—as well as black interests—improving the educational condition of Black children and promoting social mobility” (p. 5).

The wording of the Supreme Court Justices further bolsters this argument. In a unanimous decision, the Warren Court proclaimed, “We conclude that, in the field of education, the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place” (*Brown v. Bd. of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 [1954]). For many, the days of state-sanctioned denial, segregation, and miseducation appeared to be overturned along with the legality of Jim Crow statues. But the court was clear to address segregation “in the field of education.” As Bell (2004) suggests, “most black people did not notice that the Brown decision represented a convergence of black and the nation’s interests” (p. 67).

While the *Brown I* decision of 1954 rejected *de jure* segregation, it could do little about *de facto* segregation. Knowing this, the Warren opinion in the *Brown II* decision of 1955 stated that public schools should enact this decree “with all deliberate speed” (*Brown v. Bd. of Education*, 349 U.S. 294 (1955)). Though having the appearance of urgency, the *with-all-deliberate-speed* clause provided a time loophole. With *Brown II*, “The Supreme Court insisted,” Bell (2004) writes, “that its unique-compliance formula was intended to do no more than allow time for the necessary administrative changes that transformation to a desegregation school system required” (p. 95).

One of the clearest examples of the time loophole was the creation of segregated private schools or “seg academies” (Cottrol et al., 2003, p. 237). Efforts to

enforce school integration were “nullified by the massive withdrawal of white children from the public schools and the concomitant establishment of a ‘private’ school system” (Segregation Academies and State Action, 1973, p. 1436). *Brown I* and *Brown II* also hastened the phenomenon of white flight (Caldas & Bankston, 2003). The white exodus to the suburbs “led to racially separate housing patterns within the cities” (Bell, 2004, p. 110). In other words, the *Brown* decisions literally helped to shape the American landscape.²⁷ Coupled with post–World War II investments in transportation and the Federal Housing Authority, the *Brown* cases expedited the creation of suburbs. Ironically, the case that sought to dismantle legal segregation ultimately enforced de facto segregation.

Duality of *Brown*

Examining the potential harm of *Brown v. Board* is not an attempt to denigrate the work or accomplishments of previous struggles. The elimination of Jim Crow segregation was a necessary and momentous event in U.S. history. Caldas and Bankston (2003) argue that the case was the equivalent to an “earthquake” (p. 27). Nonetheless, and as evidenced by the literature, the 50th anniversary was equal parts celebration and equal parts concern (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004; Orfield & Lee, 2004).

The celebration rightfully acknowledged those who risked their lives and livelihoods fighting for the legal victory (Bash & Haddad, 2004). This is especially true of the *foot soldiers* as well as the untold and unsung heroes of the Civil Rights movement. Though commonly known as *Brown v. Board*, the Supreme Court decision was the consolidation of 5 separate cases spanning 4 states and the District of

²⁷ While much policy attention is given to *white flight*, there is the much smaller but still significant phenomenon of *black flight*. It was not uncommon for affluent and middle-class black folks to also flee deindustrialized urban centers. For an example, see Philip Murphy’s (1995) essay *Black Flight: Years of Liberal Government Drives Away D.C.’s Middle Class*, published by the Hoover Institute.

Columbia. All told, more than 140 plaintiffs are listed, and thousands more backed the effort. Jobs were lost. Homes were lost. Lives were lost. There must be a clear recognition of the sacrifice—those known as well as those unknown. And yet, there is concern that 50 years later, the education of black students is still a national crisis.

The impact of *Brown* can, in part, be understood by the interview passage below. Mrs. Vivian Scales and her family were plaintiffs in the 1955 *Brown* case in Topeka, KS. Mrs. Scales spoke to an interviewer in 1998:

Interviewer: How was schooling different for your children after the decision?

Mrs. Scales: Black people have always had it different. Very few Whites went to the Black Schools after the decision. The White parents, they had cars and took their kids to other schools.

Interview: How do you feel the decision has impacted Topeka now[,] more than forty years later?

Mrs. Scales: A big difference. All of the Black schools are closed. The jobs changed. The service changed. Will never be equal because there are some White people that won't go with the Black kids. It is a big day that they closed all of the Black schools. (quoted in McConnell, Hinitz, & Dye, 2005, p. 80)

Without question, the largest “unintended consequence” of *Brown* was the evisceration of black schools and, subsequently, black educators (Tillman, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2005). Black janitors, secretaries, bus drivers, cooks, principals, and particularly black teachers all lost their jobs. Integration meant moving black students to white schools and a systematic closure of black schools across a large swath of the United States. Ladson-Billings (2004) writes, “Not a single Black teacher in Alabama, Louisiana, or Mississippi had been assigned to a school where there were White teachers” (p. 6).

If, as Siddle Walker (2000) indicates, segregated black schools shared community focus with the church, the closure of black schools and the loss of black educators dramatically changed the nature of black communities (Morris & Morris, 2002; Tillman, 2004). Hilliard (2002) writes, “The demands of the African community were hijacked in the court system and among supporters who saw the solutions to our problems as the breakdown of communities by closing community institutions and sending children to be integrated into predominately White schools” (as cited in Morris & Morris, 2002, p. x). The result: “Black students went from schools where all of their teachers and principals were Black to schools where most, if not all, of their teachers were White” (Milner & Howard, 2004, p. 291).

In many respects, the *Brown* decision and the aftermath indicate one of the larger misplaced efforts at educational policy reform. As cited in Chapter 1, most of the collective energy has been focused on the racial separation of schools. However, and as Derrick Bell (2004) notes, there is not nearly enough emphasis on *equality*. Milner and Howard (2004) write,

The urgency to integrate schools left behind one of the most important dimensions of education change—that is, instead of focusing on moving bodies around to integrate schools, policy makers never really attended to strategies, infrastructure, and policies that might really meet the needs of all students in light of significant changes that the schools would see. (p. 295)

Milner and Howard (2004) also state, “It’s hard to imagine that Black people would have supported the decision had they had a glimpse of what was to follow” (p. 289). This is an idea shared by members of the *Brown* struggle, including Linda Brown-Thompson, whose father, Oliver Brown, is the strategic namesake for the combined court cases. Decades after the decision, Mrs. Brown-Thompson would state, “Sometimes I wonder if we really did the children and the nation a favor by taking this case to the Supreme Court. I know it was the right thing for my father and others to do

then. But after nearly forty years we find the Court's ruling unfulfilled" (quoted in Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 9).

Educational activist Jonathan Kozol is more direct in his assessment of *Brown*. He (2005) writes, "I cannot discern the slightest hint that any vestige of the legal victory embodied in *Brown v. Board of Education* or the moral mandate that a generation of unselfish activists and young idealists lived and sometimes died for has survived within these schools and neighborhoods" (p. 10). Rather, according to Milner and Howard (2004), "some would argue that [integration] marked the beginning of the troubled cycle of underachievement for many African American students and that their quality of education has not been the same since" (p. 286).

The *Brown* decision, while a legal and moral necessity, has had a drastic impact on education as it is experienced today. The decision was equal parts "interest convergence," Civil Rights triumph, symbolic victory, and misguided educational policy. Unfortunately, black students have borne the brunt of *Brown*'s failure. It is within this context—the context of failed integration—that James Anderson reminds us how little has changed. Anderson (1988) writes, "the reemergence of this 'victim blaming' ideology in the early 21st century reminds one of the ideological rationales for racial segregation at the dawn of the 20th century" (p. 360).

Deficit Model Approaches

Paul Gorski (2005) defines a deficit model as "an approach through which scholars explain varying levels of opportunity and access (educationally, professionally, and in other spheres) among groups of people by identifying deficits in the cultures and behaviors of the underprivileged group" (p. 8). Unfortunately, much of the current literature on black academic success falls prey to this paradigmatic thinking.

In many of the prevailing social theories, the deficiencies of black students are claimed to be expressed by a “fear of acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986); “academic disengagement” (Ogbu, 2003); or “creative maladjustment” (Kohl, 1994). Additional attacks on the culture of black students are wrapped in attacks on hip-hop culture (Ginwright, 2004; Perry et al., 2003). But one does not have to look to hip-hop or engage in an extensive search for cultural deficient arguments.

The depth of this idea appears to have seeped into pop culture and mainstream media. During his highly praised 2004 Democratic National Convention speech, Senator Barack Obama declared, “children can’t achieve unless we raise their expectations and turn off the television sets and eradicate the slander that says a black youth with a book is acting white.”²⁸ Moreover, Bill Cosby echoed remarkably similar sentiments during a highly publicized address at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s 50th celebration of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In his controversial *Pound Cake Speech*, Cosby (2004) would go on to state that young black folks are “fighting hard to be ignorant.”²⁹

And last, when questioned about spending \$40 million to build a school in South Africa rather than her adopted hometown of Chicago, billionaire media mogul Oprah Winfrey stated, “I became so frustrated with visiting inner-city schools that I just stopped going. The sense that you need to learn just isn’t there” (quoted in Daniels, 2007). Winfrey, who should be praised for her Leadership Academy in South Africa on one hand, also states that she built her school in South Africa because black American girls do not want to work for education. From mainstream media to educational researchers to policy makers, there is a strong belief in black students’ supposed cultural deficit and disregard for education.

²⁸ Obama, B. (2004, July 27). 2004 Democratic National Convention Address. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19751-2004Jul27.html>

²⁹ Cosby, B. (2004, May 17). Address to the NAACP’s 50th Anniversary Celebration of Brown v. Board. Available at: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/billcosbypoundcakespeech.htm>

When one strips away the rhetoric and the sound bites, the prevailing theory is that racial disparities result from “high expectations, mitigated by a weak work ethic and a persistent opposition to so-called white models of academic achievement, [which] lead to frustration and low academic performance among African American schoolchildren” (Anderson, 1988, p. 363). In short, we are left with a troubling result: blaming black students for their continued miseducation. While policy makers continue to support “the ideology of African American moral, cultural, and intellectual deficiency” (Perry, 2003, p. 9), we put all of our faith and resources behind a belief that success is possible only if we could succeed in teaching black and poor students to “act more like middle class children” (Tough, 2006). Still, the most powerful impact of deficit paradigms may have less to do with the direct effect on black students. As Gorski (2005) writes, the deficit model “relieves people in the upper and middle classes of responsibility” (p. 10). Deficit models say much less about black students and say much more about researchers, teachers, and policy makers.

Educating Black Students Today

Regrettably, the half-century since the *Brown* decision contains status report after status report that documents the unfulfilled promise of the *Brown* cases. *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1966), *Inequalities in the Educational Experiences of Black and White Americans* (1977), *Black Education* (1989), *Visions of a Better Way* (1989), and *The Educational Progress of Black Students* (1995) and others all record the glaring racial inequalities in public education.

The NAACP’s 2001 report *Call for Action in Education* states that the inequalities are severe and have “resulted from persistent patterns of unequal resource distribution over many years” (p. 4). In 2003, another report, *Status and Trends in the Education of Blacks*, “presents a selection of indicators that illustrate the educational

gains made in recent years as well as the many gaps that still exist” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 1).

Published in wake of Hurricane Katrina, Tavis Smiley’s *Covenant with Black America* declares, “By almost all the common indicators of academic achievement and school quality, students who identify themselves as black suffer in the comparisons with students who identify themselves as white” (Gordon, quoted in Smiley, 2006, p. 26). The *Covenant* warns, “Black children are disproportionately denied a fair chance . . . An unlevel playing field from birth contributes to many poor black children getting pulled in to a cradle-to-prison-to-death pipeline . . .” (Gordon, quoted in Smiley, 2006, p. xiii).

It is known that *Brown* did not attempt to equalize schools, but it has also failed to integrate schools. In fact, “[a]t the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, public school systems throughout the United States were moving toward racial re-segregation” (Caldas & Bankston, 2003, p. 1). The Harvard Civil Rights Project report *Brown at 50: King’s Dream or Plessey’s Nightmare?* warns, “We are celebrating a victory over segregation at a time when schools across the nation are becoming increasingly segregated” (Orfield & Lee, 2004, p. 2).

Furthermore, the Education Trust has documented a persistent *funding gap* for black schools, adding, “It’s really inexcusable that this continues to be such a problem” (Carey, 2003, p. 2). Kozol, whose book *Savage Inequalities* (1991) may be the definitive text on the under-resourcing of urban schools, highlights the continued use of curriculum designed to force entry into the lowest economic rungs. According to Kozol (2005), “the race-specific emphasis of the curriculum” induced one teacher to say, “I can do this with my dog” (p. 75). There is also clear evidence of not only resegregation but also of *second-generation segregation* (Spring, 2004, p. 110).

Accordingly, even in integrated schools, segregation via tracking and ability grouping runs rampant (Bell, 1980; Burris & Welner, 2005; Oakes, 1986).

Educating Black Students: Lessons Learned

It is not possible to accurately summarize 300 years of history and the volume of literature on black students and schooling. Still, the history of black education in the United States offers two compelling arguments. First, it clearly dispels the notion of the so-called *achievement gap*. While there exists a clear difference in educational outcomes, there is not a gap of achievement. Rather, it is the continuation of miseducation and undereducation within a racially and economically stratified system. When viewed within the context of the historic struggle, the educational achievements of black students to date are nothing short of extraordinary. Anderson (1988) states,

A careful examination of blacks' enduring belief in education and their historic struggle to acquire decent educational opportunities against almost overwhelming odds leaves little room to attribute their relatively low levels of educational attainment to uncongenial cultural values or education norms. (p. 285)

In other words, there is a strong cultural affinity for education. Second, this historic struggle to obtain a quality education debunks any and all *deficit arguments* about the creation of educational disparities. History provides a strong counternarrative that “stands in opposition to the dominant society’s notions about the intellectual capacity of African Americans, the role of learning in their lives, the meaning and purpose of school and the power of their intellect” (Perry, 2003, p. 49). To quote Anderson once more,

It is ironic that in a time a body of historical and social science literature was built up which tended to interpret blacks' relatively lower levels of educational attainment in the twentieth century as the product of initial differences in attitude or cultural orientation toward learning and self-improvement. (Anderson, 1988, p. 285)

Cultural Capital Theory and Social Reproduction

Given the preponderance of research and scholarship, particularly in suburban schools, that focuses on deficit models, a brief review of cultural capital and social reproduction theories is useful. Both social reproduction theory and cultural capital theory contend that educational systems ultimately work to reproduce racial and economic oppression.

One of the earlier works to specifically address cultural capital theory is Basil Bernstein's (1971) *Class, Codes and Control*. In particular, Bernstein's work is concerned with the *social structure* of language as a mechanism for control, and he contends that codes of communication inherent within the class structure will either reward or hinder educational success. Thus, class codes serve as a *de facto* gatekeeper. Bernstein (1971) writes,

Where children are limited to a restricted code, primarily because of the sub-culture and role systems of the family, community and work, we can expect a major problem of educability whose source lies not so much in the genetic code but in the culturally determined communication code. (p. 151)

As such, those who come from a culture (class) with greater access to dominant codes of communication will do better in school. In this way, societies and schools reproduce inequalities simply because they operate from what has already been established. Bernstein (1971) continues his framework by claiming,

How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. (p. 202)

Similar connections are explored by Rachel Sharp and Anthony Green (1975). The authors state,

In a complex and differentiated society education is a crucial mechanism for socialization and social control initiating people into those skills, attitudes and values that are essential for effective role performance. (p. 220)

Accordingly, Sharp and Green (1975) posit that educational outcomes are the direct result of economic needs. Slavery, industrialization, and the arrival of a knowledge economy call for a corresponding shift in educational pedagogy. Education systems exert social control by replenishing (reproducing) the labor force. Sharp and Green (1975) also maintain that educational practices attempt to *civilize* students into future roles (p. 62) and that “subtle modes of ascription continue to operate which have resulted in little change in the underlying structure of opportunity” (p. 224).

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) may have been the most direct in their work *Schooling in Capitalist America*. The authors postulate that the educational institutions, by design, seek no more than to perpetuate class inequities. Bowles and Gintis (1976) write,

The halting contribution of U.S. education to equality and full human development appears intimately related to the nature of the economic structures into which the schools must integrate each new generation of youth. (p. 53)

Bowles and Gintis (1976) also add, “the maintenance of such a ‘reserve army’ of skilled labor has been a major, and not unintended, effect of U.S. education through the years” (p. 55).

Within the *cultural capital* and *social reproduction* framework, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron’s (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* is probably the most-cited work. The authors define and articulate the theory that schools reward *high culture* and subsequently punish those who do not possess it. Moreover, the capital associated with one’s culture is the largest unspoken assumption of schools. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) write,

The apparently purely academic cult of hierarchy always contributes to the defense and legitimization of social hierarchies, because academic hierarchies, whether of degrees and diplomas or establishments and disciplines, always owe something to the social hierarchies which they tend to re-produce (in both senses). (p. 152)

The authors continue,

The unnatural idea of culture by birth presupposes and produces blindness to the functions of the educational institution which ensures the profitability of cultural capital and legitimates its transmission by dissimulating the fact that it performs this function. (p. 210)

Bourdieu and Passeron's work is of importance because, as Lamont and Lareau (1988) state, it possesses the ability to "analyze the impact of culture on the class system and on the relationship between action and social structure" (p. 154).

Last, Michael Apple's (1979) *Ideology and Curriculum* continues to highlight the oppressive nature of schooling, and like many of the authors above, Apple proclaims the purpose of schools is to promote cultural and ideological hegemony. He (1979) writes, "There can be no longer any doubt that schools do seem to be institutions of economic and cultural reproduction" (p. 1).

In summation, most of this work argues that schools not only affirm the dominant culture but also actively seek to replicate its structure. The *correct* behavior, social norms, and modes of communication are essential if one is striving for educational success. In this system, middle-class, white norms become imbedded as the "hidden curriculum" (Apple, 1979; Gay, 2000). If, as has been argued, the interests and needs of black students have historically been placed on the periphery, then schools are not constructed for black student success.

Though there is considerable scholarship on the role and function of social reproduction theories, the concepts are not universally accepted or applied. One of the most basic critiques of social reproduction and cultural capital is the heavy reliance on

neo-Marxist analysis. Much of the work on social reproduction falls prey to “economically reductionalist models” (Morrow & Torres, 1995, p. 3). One is hard-pressed to avoid references to employment, capitalism, Marxism, and a host of catchphrases pointing to economic systems. Such models may not suit all people across time and space. In other words, strict economic analysis neglects the interplay of race, gender, sexuality, and other mitigating factors. As Asante (1988) argues, “Marxism does not answer questions which confront people of African descent in societies where Europeans control the economics” (p. 79).

Another limitation of this model is the rigidity of the process espoused by many who advocated the theory’s importance. At their core, these theories argue that a direct correlation exists between the amount of cultural capital and the level educational success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1975; DiMaggio, 1982). Education becomes a destiny machine and students from lower socioeconomic statuses cannot avoid the trappings of reproduction. More recent theorizing explores and challenges the lack of agency and the role of *mobility* (Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell (1999) write,

The alternative to the reproduction processes just outlined is cultural mobility, in which cultural and educational resources directly translate into a student’s ability or interest in academic subjects without the student having to be rewarded or evaluated by other actors or institution mechanisms in the school setting. (p. 162)

Lareau and Horvat (1999) echo this point by adding, “The process of social reproduction is not a smooth trajectory based on individual characteristics that are seamlessly transmitted across generations” (p. 50). There is agency and resistance. As schools are currently constructed, they provide just enough flexibility and exceptions to keep hope alive. Giroux (1983) states,

The point here is that there are some serious deficiencies in existing theories of reproduction, the most important of which is the refusal to posit a form of critique that demonstrates the theoretical and practical importance of counter-hegemonic struggles. (p. 77)

The value in understanding and exploring the arguments of cultural capital and social reproduction can be put to use in examining No Child Left Behind. The former Secretary of Education, Tommy Thompson, commissioned a report to evaluate and offer reforms to the widest sweeping education law at the federal level. The opening lines from the Aspen Commission's No Child Left Behind Report (2007) state, "We see evidence every day that we are letting our children down . . . We cannot afford to sit idly by and hope that things will improve."³⁰ The final Aspen report is eerily similar to its 1983 predecessor, *A Nation at Risk*. In essence, both ask, "Do we risk jeopardizing the future of our nation's children and our competitiveness in the global economy by maintaining the status quo?" (Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007, p. 11). Clearly the question is intended to be rhetorical, and the Aspen Commission ominously warns that too many students are "left unprepared for life in an increasingly competitive global economy" (Commission on No Child Left Behind, 2007, p. 13). In other words, educational policies are being constructed with a keen awareness of global economic forces. It is in the process of translation—from policy to practice—that social reproduction and cultural capital theories are most commonly situated.

There is no doubt that schools promote class codes and affirm particular cultural norms. This, in part, is why many black educational scholars have argued for Afrocentric reforms (Asante, 1991b; Kenyatta, 1998; Kunjufu, 1995; Watson & Smitherman, 1996). Social reproduction and cultural capital theories may offer some insight, particularly in relation to black students, but they can also obscure real issues

³⁰ Aspen Commission Executive Summary, *Beyond NCLB*, p. 1.

in schools. The real question becomes not how to give some students more cultural capital but, “How do we make education meaningful by making it critical, and how do we make it critical so as to make it emancipatory?” (Giroux, 1983, p. 3).

Critical Race Theory and Education

Kimberle Crenshaw’s invited keynote address to commemorate the 35th anniversary of Cornell’s Africana Studies and Research Center deftly captures the nexus of Africana studies and critical race theory. Crenshaw weaves her academic training in Africana with her scholarship as a critical race theorist and describes how she was “exposed to the tensions between frameworks that framed racial inequality in terms of our personal agency—our faults—versus frameworks that understood the structures of white supremacy and their continuity in contemporary society.”³¹ She states that the combination helped her to form a “radical critique of racial civil rights and a racial critique of radical legal studies.” Similarly, my reading of and work with *Afrocentricity* (outlined in Chapter 3) has complemented my understanding of critical race theory (CRT) within education.

There is a significant body of scholarship that employs a CRT framework in the field of education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Gillborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While relatively young, CRT literature also helps to contextualize the failure of educational policies and reforms designed to improve the experiences of black students. In February of 2002, *Qualitative Inquiry* released a special issue devoted to the growing promise of CRT within the field of education. The introduction states, “One can view CRT as following a path similar to postmodernist and/or poststructuralists criticisms of

³¹ Crenshaw, K. (2005, April 29). Over the Shoulder: Africana Studies Meets the Law—a genealogy of Critical Race Theory [video]. Africana Studies and Research Center; Cornell University. This talk was the keynote address as part of the 35th-anniversary celebratory events of Cornell’s Africana Center.

research and policy language that rejects modernist notions of single-truth claims of objective discipline-based knowledge and policy answers” (Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002, p. 4). Additionally, CRT advocates the use of story and authentic voice “as a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 31).

Critical race theory not only highlights the primacy of *race* in institutional operations, it equally underscores the need for alternative voices to be heard. Critical race theory’s use of interest convergence (Bell, 1980), whiteness as property (Harris, 1993), racial realism theory (Bell, 1992), and critiques of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1995) makes it a useful tool in examining educational inequity. DeCuir and Dixson (2004) write,

These particular aspects of CRT are especially powerful because through them, researchers are able to uncover and unmask the persistent and oppressive nature of the normativity of Whiteness, the co-option and distortion of oppositional discourses, and the ways in which policies that are offered as remedies to underachievement and educational disparities may not be in the best interests of marginalized groups, but rather serve the elite. (p. 30)

Conclusion of Literature Review

The sheer volume of literature and scholarship focusing on black students reflects the importance of education as a social, political, economic, and racial institution. Whether tracing historical unfoldings or unpacking research assumptions, the literature review points to the ways in which educational policy has influenced societal ordering. Understanding how black students have been passive and active participants in educational structuring helps to contextualize the connection between policy and achievement. Ultimately, however, education is a local—if not a personal—endeavor. The national writings of scholars, novelists, and researchers elucidate how and why change is in order at local levels. For this reason, the national

literature review helps provide the context for local histories and localized racial disparities in educational outcomes. This literature review also explains why the remaining chapters—particularly Chapter 6 and the *timeloop* of black students in Ithaca, NY—repeatedly speak back to the key themes found in this chapter. Educational neglect, miseducation, and the pedagogy of oppression are found at the national and local levels.

CHAPTER 3: AFROCENTRIC ASSUMPTIONS

The Quest for a Research Methodology

While the ultimate concern is with black students and educational policy, DuBois's notion of double-consciousness is an excellent introduction to the research methodologies used throughout this dissertation. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. DuBois (1903) writes,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and the Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is sort of a seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelations of the other world. (pp. 10–11)

Beyond his forewarnings for another century of the color line, one of DuBois's greatest gifts in *Souls* was his articulation of the paradoxical nature of black American identity. *Double-consciousness*, as DuBois (1903) termed it, was the inescapable tension of “[t]wo thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (p. 11).

Within the realm of academia, this tension is most prominently found at the nexus of research and lived experiences. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) writes, “I found the movement between my training as ‘objective’ social scientist and my daily experiences as an African American woman jarring” (p. ix). After all, double-consciousness is created by the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (DuBois, 1903, p. 11). Double-consciousness can easily create a conflicted notion of self. However, DuBois also argues that it is an awareness. It is the acknowledged disconnect between perception and reality—or one’s perception of reality. It is the cognition of a *second sight*. Delgado (1995) suggests this “ability to

think of everything in two or more ways at the same time” may actually provide an “advantage in mastering and applying critical social thought” (p. 8).

My own experience with double-consciousness has led to a critique of deficit model approaches and a quest to use research methodologies that would avoid the “usually unconscious adoption of the Western worldview and perspective and their attendant conceptual frameworks” (Mazama, 2001, p. 387). Navigating the racially coded *veil* of double-consciousness was an important consideration in selecting a research methodology and led to the utilization of *Afrocentric* research methods. While an outline of the nature of Afrocentric research methods will be detailed in Chapter 4, it is first necessary to define and clarify *Afrocentricity*.

Afrocentricity and Assumptions

Defining *Afrocentricity* is not an easy task. Mazama (2001) is correct in her assertion that people tend to define *Afrocentricity* on their own terms and “to suit their own purposes” (p. 389). One possible reason for the difficulty may be the lack of agreement on what term should be used (Milam, 1992). Throughout the literature, *Afrocentricity* (West, 1994), *Africentricity* (Akinyela, 1995; Harris, 1999), *Africancentricity* (Alkebulan, 2007), and *Afrocentrism* (Collins, 2006; Stewart, 1998) are assigned frequently. While these terms have sometimes been used synonymously, more often, they are employed to indicate theoretical differences in their meanings. For example, John Henrik Clarke, states, “I have an argument with the word ‘Afrocentricity’ because it is a compromise with the word Africa. There is no ‘fro’ in Africa” (quoted in Alkebulan, 2007, p. 421). Rather, Clarke prefers the term *Africacentricity*. *Afrocentrism*, on the other hand, tends to be the term of preference for critics and those who have engaged in salacious attacks (D’Souza, 1995; Howe,

1998; Leftkowitz, 1996). Despite the differences and debates, the term *Afrocentricity* has found the largest audience and acceptance.

Keto (1995) states, *Afrocentricity* is “an encapsulating term that is used to describe the complex theoretical process of knowledge formation which places Africans at the center of information about themselves” (p. vii). West (1994) defines *Afrocentricity* as “the belief that images and symbols derived from African and African American life experiences are necessary and appropriate guides for people of African decent” (p. 28). For Makungu Akinyela (1995) this definition “refers to an intellectual discourse which is concerned with integrating an interdisciplinary field of study from a common world view” (p. 22).

For the purposes of this study, *Afrocentricity* is defined as *a theoretical framework that locates the values, experiences, and ideals of black people as/at the center of analysis*. To better understand the main ideas, arguments, and assumptions of *Afrocentricity*, Asante’s *The Afrocentric Idea* (1987) or *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990); C.T. Keto’s *Vision, Identity and Time* (1995) and *Vision and Time* (2001); as well as Mazama’s *The Afrocentric Paradigm* (2003) serve as excellent primers. Because this project utilizes an Afrocentric approach, a clear articulation and clarification of the major assumptions of an Afrocentric paradigm is needed.

In reviewing the modest amount of literature, a *list* of the frequently utilized assumptions clearly emerges. This is not to indicate an absence of hostile debate regarding the utilization of said assumptions. Though proponents and detractors generally agree on what constitutes the main assumptions within the Afrocentric paradigm, there is considerable misunderstanding on their appropriateness, legitimacy, and validity. What follows is a discussion of the seven main ideological assumptions that have frequently defined the foundation of an Afrocentric paradigm.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that my thinking and theorizing on *Afrocentricity* is heavily influenced by a course reader compiled by Dr. Ayele Bekerie. My enrollment in his course on *Afrocentricity*, along with my subsequent independent study with Dr. Bekerie, helped the list below to take shape. Thus, while many of the articles will be cited as they were originally published, a significant number are to be found in my *Afrocentricity* course reader (Bekerie, 1999). Last, this list and discussion below does not follow a particular order other than to facilitate a concise discussion and ease in transitioning from one assumption to the next.

- All humanity shares a common ancestral bond with the continent of Africa.
- Egypt/Kemet was an African civilization and was integral to African/world history.
- Hegemony is not universal.
- Communalism and kinship are key components of the African reality.
- Africans are co-creators and not objects of destiny, history, and experience.
- African values, culture, and epistemology are the center of any analysis.
- Holistic approaches to knowledge are essential for liberation.

All humanity shares a common ancestral bond with the continent of Africa

In his final published work, Cheik Anta Diop (1991) writes, “The monogenetic and African origin of humanity is becoming, every day, a more tangible fact” (p. 25). Diop’s assertion and writings concerning the African origin of humanity symbolize one of the seven underlying assumptions of Afrocentric thought.

Many scholars from within (and an equally impressive number from outside) the Afrocentric paradigm have documented global humanity’s connection with the

African continent (Asante, 1999; Bekerie, 1994; Bennett, 1988; Jean, 1991). Diop (1991) adds, “The sole scientific conclusion conforming to the evidence is that the earliest humans, the very first *Homo sapiens*, were ‘Negroids’” (p. 262). Clinton Jean (1991) poses and answers the question “Who were the Blacks? They are the first humans in history” (p. 73). And Ayele Bekerie (1994) adds, “It is widely acknowledged that Africa is the original birthplace of human beings” (p. 137).

It is fitting, then, that this belief in an African origin of humanity has become a fundamental tenet of *Afrocentricity*. For at least the past half-century, the scientific community has accepted Africa as the origin of our most ancient relatives. Paleontological and archaeological journals have detailed the “origins” of modern humanity, and the oldest identifiable remains have been located on the African continent. Subsequently, the theory hypothesizes that all people originated on the African continent and dispersed through spatial and physical realms.

Though there has been relative consensus regarding the evolution of people out of Africa, there has been no consensus regarding what happens next. Thus, while Western scholars can concede a physical African origin, they have offered severe resistance to an intellectual African genesis. In fact, some attempts to define modern humanity are clear to distinguish between African *Homo sapiens* and European *Homo sapiens*. Unscientifically, this account purports that the *Homo sapiens afer* (Black African) is ruled by caprice, while the *Homo sapiens europaeus* (white European) is ruled by customs (Harding, 1993). Or, stated differently, this supremacist ideology puts forth that early African humans were ruled solely by instinct, while only European humans were ruled by abstract thought. For example, Richard Klein has argued that a genetic mutation in the brain is responsible for the sudden appearance of human language and modern behavior occurring in Europe some 50,000 years ago (quoted in Wilford, 2001).

The danger of such scientific racism is far-reaching. Describing the Western desire and wish for racial supremacy, William Watkins (2001) has written, “If ‘proof’ could demonstrate that nature rendered Whites superior, a ready-made explanation for social hierarchy could be established” (p. 24). Watkins goes on to explain that “notions of difference in the social order have long been a part of the western intellectual tradition” (p. 25).

The simple fact of an African genesis presents a clear and complete challenge to European hegemonic claims. Its very existence is the ultimate threat to Eurocentric beliefs of supremacy. Jean (1991) states, “Black anteriority anthropologically and culturally is an argument against white supremacy” (p. 73). Even though the dominant paradigm may attempt to ignore the basic humanity of African people, the assumption of a common African ancestral bond both calmly and simply asserts its own truth. Even while this assumption may not be articulated or discernibly utilized in this dissertation project, the African origin of humanity is essential to the formulation of an Afrocentric approach.

Egypt/Kemet was an African civilization and was integral to African/world history

One of the most debated assumptions of the Afrocentric paradigm revolves around Kemet, more commonly referred to as Ancient Egypt. David Walker’s (1830) *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* demonstrates the longitude (and latitude) in understanding the meaning of Kemetic civilization. Walker (1830) writes,

When we take a retrospective view of the arts and sciences—the wise legislators—the Pyramids, and other magnificent buildings—the turning of the channels of the river Nile, by the sons of African or of Ham, among whom learning originated, and was carried thence into Greece, where it was improved upon. Thence among the Romans, and all over the then enlightened parts of the world, and it has been enlightening the dark and benighted minds of men from then, down to this day. (Article II)

Egyptian primacy and importance is also echoed by Edward W. Blyden's *The Negro in Ancient History* (1869), Martin R. Delany's *The Origins of Race and Color* (1880), George James' *Stolen Legacy* (1954), Cheik Anta Diop's (1974) *The African Origin of Civilization*, Yosef Ben-Jochannen's *Africa: Mother of 'Western Civilization'* (1971), and a host of other scholarly works. More recently, scholars such as Maulana Karenga (1982), and the works of Molefi Asante (1987; 1988; 1990; 1999), have intently claimed Kemet's importance in the context of an Afrocentric framework. Asante (1988) writes,

The Afrocentric analysis reestablishes the centrality of ancient Kemetic [Egyptian] civilization and the Nile Valley cultural complex as points of reference for an African perspective in much the same way that Greece and Rome serve as reference points for the European world. (p. 11)

When discussing this assumption, probably no other work has garnered more attention than that of Martin Bernal's (1987) *Black Athena*. Not only does Bernal make the argument that ancient Egyptians were composed of black-skinned African peoples, he further postulates that Ancient Greece was heavily influenced by its knowledge of and interactions with Egypt. Thus, as Bernal argues, Ancient Egypt replaces Greece as the "fount of European Civilization" (p. 189). While Bernal's work was not written from within a purposefully Afrocentric framework, his volume has been widely used by skeptics and proponents to discuss the Afrocentric paradigm. One must also note that many of the authors working within *Afrocentricity* are scholars of African descent. It is possible that in the racially constructed context of intellectual debates, Bernal's *notoriety* (*infamy* in some quarters) is heightened because he is white. For scholars on multiple sides of the argument, Bernal's *race* was noteworthy. Nonetheless, while others have often argued similar findings, Bernal's work has had much influence and popularity in the debate on *Afrocentricity*.

Part of the dispute over Bernal's work is the claim of Kemet as a distinctly black civilization. While it is one argument to herald Egyptian civilization as the foundation of modern civilization, it is quite another to assert/insert the *race* of ancient Egyptians. In *Intellectual Warfare*, Jacob Carruthers discusses this view while revisiting the ideas of Cheik Anta Diop. Carruthers (1999) writes,

Kemet was the initiator and decisive influence on the major aspects of Greek, Hebrew, Moslem, and Christian civilizations. Thus, the African people of Egypt were the inventors of the basic sciences, including mathematics; the philosophical and theological concepts; the architectural designs; the engineering technologies; and complicated surgery and medical practices. (p. 224)

And yet, espousing the greatness of Ancient Egypt does little for Afrocentric thinkers unless more is understood about the racial make-up of Kemetic civilization. In the *Painful Demise of Eurocentrism*, Molefi Asante (1999) writes,

The ancient Africans spoke of themselves as black, the very name by which they called their country, Kemet, "the black country," or "the black land" and Kemetiu, "the black people," shows that they had no problem with their physical appearance. (p. 41)

Asante and many others have drawn their ideas from Diop's seminal work, *The African Origin of Civilization*. Diop (1974) writes,

Contrary to generally accepted notions, it is clear that the most ancient documents available on Egyptian and world history portray Blacks as free citizens, masters of the country and of nature. (p. 84)

It should be noted that there is a clear need for Eurocentric scholars, operating from the paradigm of white supremacy, to deny the blackness of Kemet. Accordingly, the preponderance of *Afrocentricity*'s critics focus almost exclusively on Kemet (Howe, 1998; Lefkowitz, 1992, 1996; Walker, 2001). Ann Macy Roth epitomizes the argument denying Kemet's Africanness. Roth (1995) writes, "it had never occurred to

me that the ancient Egyptians were any color in particular. Neither black nor white seemed an appropriate category—they were simply Egyptian” (n.p.). Such statements are indicative of Eurocentricity’s ability to selectively de-emphasize the construction of *race* whenever this construction calls Eurocentric hegemony into question. It then manifests itself as Eurocentric universalism in that if something is not clearly stated to the contrary, it is assumed to operate under the European notions of humanity; read *white*.

Why has Egypt been a major assumption within *Afrocentricity*? From its early origins, Egyptian cultural and scientific achievements can be seen as a countering force to supposed European dominance. As much as it benefits *Afrocentricity*’s detractors from denying the racial composition of Kemet, there is a conversely tremendous benefit for Afrocentric scholars to pronounce Kemet’s Africanness. It possesses the ability to eliminate negative stereotypes imposed on the continent of Africa. If Greece, the ultimate symbol of European Enlightenment, inherited much of its culture from Egypt, Western descriptors would have to reconcile such notions as the “Dark Continent.”

These are not issues to be taken lightly. Still, there will be no attempt here to either prove or disprove the *race* of Kemetic civilizations. What we can say with almost complete certainty is that the ancient Egyptians were not white as constructed by U.S. classifications. Taking this any further brings one dangerously close to the fallacy of Eurocentric racial divisions (*race* itself being a political/economic construction created within the modern era of European enslaving and European colonizing). I make this statement in spite of the fact that scholars have cited compelling evidence regarding the *blackness* of Kemet (Asante, 1990; Diop, 1991). Nonetheless, we can end this portion of the discussion by simply stating that one can be assured that these same skin hues, operating from within the Eurocentric

framework of the “one-drop” rule, would certainly have segregated Ancient Egyptians during Jim Crow. Or, as Wilson Moses poignantly stated, “In fact many of the Pharaohs, if transplanted across time and onto the Chattanooga Choo-Choo in 1945, would have a hard time obtaining a Pullman berth or being seated in a dining car” (quoted in Sundiata, 1996, para. 16).

While Kemet’s importance and influence cannot be overemphasized in the global context, its importance to the Afrocentric framework has often overshadowed other assumptions. Again, this is not to say that understanding Kemet and its Africanness does not greatly influence Afrocentric thought or the greater global framework. There is incredible promise in knowing *truth* as a counter to racist myths. However, this assumption has also opened the critique of adopting supremacy for supremacy. The historian Kwame Appiah (1993) signaled this by entitling his critique “Europe upside down.” Appiah’s claim is that Afrocentric scholars have become contradictory in their approach. Though Appiah’s critique of *Afrocentricity* contains flaws, he does raise a valid point. In fact, while Appiah and the majority of *Afrocentricity*’s critics operate from outside an Afrocentric paradigm, even those employing Afrocentric methodology have warned not to overly romanticize or glorify Kemet (Mazama, 2001; Reviere, 2001). Makungu Akinyela (1995) requires a rethinking of *Afrocentricity* and concludes this very idea by writing,

Counter-hegemonic, cultural action seeks to discredit or refute the pillars of the dominant value system, not legitimate them by posing similar, albeit “Afrocentric,” values and assumptions about the social structure, history and epistemology. (p. 36)

Hegemony is not universal

Arguably, the most significant assumption of the Afrocentric paradigm is the adoption of a nonhegemonic worldview. In *Vision, Identity and Time*, C. Tsehloane

Keto (1995) writes, “I wish to go on record as opposing any and all attempts to make the Afrocentric paradigm hegemonic by defining knowledge about the world’s people in monocentric terms” (p. 33). Rather, an Afrocentric paradigm seeks to view the world and others in nonuniversalist ways. In doing so, *Afrocentricity*, by default, denies the universality of Eurocentricity. In *The Africa-Centered Perspective of History*, Keto (1991) further addresses this issue and states,

The perspective made implicit claims of universality for legitimate Europe-centered values before any in depth comparative studies were undertaken in other parts of the world to verify whether the European experience lived up to the claims of universality. (p. 19)

Asante (1999) adds to the dialogue by addressing the notion of universalism, stating, “the imposition of the Eurocentric perspective on every subject and theme as if the Eurocentric position is the only human and universal view is the fundamental basis of a racist response to history” (p. 110). Since universalists’ ideas ignore key African and world realities, a primary step in Afrocentric thought is to directly expose the mechanisms that continue to promote neglect. Consequently, there is a clear need to counter universalist notions of Eurocentric hegemony.

Jean’s (1991) *Behind the Eurocentric Veils* and Charles Mills’s (1997) *The Racial Contract* are examples of two works that directly address notions of European universalism. Jean (1991) believes racial stratification is inherent in Eurocentricity and argues that the universalism originates “from an assumption that liberal formulas—Eurocentric formulas, period—were the universal benchmark by which to judge the worth of all cultural practices.”

Mills (1997) agrees, and in detailing the manifestations of Eurocentric universalism he testifies,

A standard undergraduate philosophy course will start off with Plato and Aristotle . . . It will introduce you to notions of aristocracy, democracy,

absolutism, liberalism, representative government, socialism, welfare capitalism, and libertarianism. But though it covers more than two thousand years of western political thought and runs the ostensible gamut of political systems, there will be no mention of the basic political system that has shaped the world for the past several hundred years. And this omission is not accidental. Rather, it reflects the fact that standard textbooks and courses have for the most part been written and designed by whites, who take their racial privilege so much for granted that they do not even see it as political, as a form of domination. (p. 1)

Unfortunately, this is the ultimate form of universalist thinking: to assume, for so long, that it is your reality and only your reality that matters, that you do not even begin to see—or question—your own perspective. We have no better example of Eurocentric hegemony than to look at the various critiques of the Afrocentric paradigm.

Mary Lefkowitz (1992; 1996), Dinesh D’Souza (1995), Stephen Howe (1998), Clarence Walker (2001), and others have gone to great lengths to discredit the Afrocentric paradigm. These scholars have questioned the integrity and legitimacy of *Afrocentricity* from behind the veil of Eurocentric hegemony. Each employs a particular version of universalism as the basis for his or her critique without acknowledging the inherent contradiction. Judith-Ann Stewart proposes the rationale for intellectual inconsistencies of such detractors. Stewart (1998) writes, “The supremacy, values, and traditions of the Western world are dependent on the maintenance of a Eurocentric hegemonic construct of the world” (p. 315). As such, when Lefkowitz (1992) claims that *Afrocentricity* poses a “threat to rationalist tradition,” she is ironically advocating the very need for an Afrocentric paradigm. As Stewart (1998) states, “In their own words, the essence of *Afrocentricity* must be denied, its strive for the truth must be subverted, and the discipline discredited by all means possible, for the threat to the status quo is too great” (p. 315).

The advocacy of a nonhegemonic paradigm may arguably be the most significant assumption of *Afrocentricity* to threaten the status quo. It is here that the crux of the real *Afrocentricity* debate has occurred. We see the immediate impact of

such a view when discussing social science research. Western hegemony reserves the sole ability to define and create knowledge.

Objectivity, or the *veil*, as it is referred to by the titles of Jean's *Behind the Eurocentric Veil* and Ruth Reviere's *Lifting the Veil*, works not only to obscure the truth but also to *color* research. The advocacy of a nonhegemonic paradigm means that until we dispose of universalist notions, justice in research will be hidden in plain sight. More about the role of objectivity in social science will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Communalism and kinship are key components of the African reality

Jean (1991) has asserted that "African Kinship systems may be regarded as cultural inventions of primal significance" (p. 88). Jean continues, "Kinship and its attendant values undergirded all societies of traditional Africa" (p. 88). Simply stated, communalism and kinship are key components of an African reality.

We find numerous examples of scholars within the Afrocentric framework outlining the communal aspects of African culture (Akbar, 1996; Asante, 1990; Davidson, 1992; Diop, 1991; Keto, 1995). Reviere (2001) writes, "the canon of Ujamaa—that is the need for the recognition and maintenance of community—is a requirement of Afrocentric research" (p. 719). Reviere goes further to state that rejection of Eurocentric individualism is a "natural consequence of the African cultural environment, which encourages communalism rather than individual separation" (p. 719).

In discussing the role of *Afrocentricity* in mentoring experiences, Felicia Harris (1999) states that this principle of Ujamaa stresses the "convergence of 'I' and 'We'" (p. 233). In other words, Afrocentric discourse assumes the old African proverb "I am because we are and because we are, therefore, I am." Harris (1999) states,

The individual within the Africentric philosophy is representative of the whole. Everything is functionally connected. Kinship controls all the relationships in the community. The community (tribe) has created the individual. Therefore, the existence of the community is not dependent on individual achievement. (p. 234)

Communalism and kinship are fundamental understandings, as Ama Mazama (2001) has stated: “No analysis which neglects the communal nature of a paradigm can capture the essence of the concept” (p. 403). This idea becomes more important given the context of the American ethos of “rugged individualism.” The notions of individual versus communal social interaction are only one example of the competing relationships between Afrocentric and Eurocentric frameworks. While one needs to be very clear in not positioning *Afrocentricity* and Eurocentricity as dichotomous entities, we cannot escape the reality that they do, at times, possess opposing (countering) characteristics.

The value of communalism and kinship lies in *Afrocentricity*’s ability to examine and reveal social phenomena. As such, communal approaches take into account the structure of society. Policies, reforms, and evaluations from an Afrocentric perspective consider the individual within community—and vice versa. In other words, the Eurocentric framework conceptualizes individual failure as a lack of want, desire, or hard work. The absence of a context or connection has propagated a body of research that fully subscribes to failures as personified deficits. Taken to the next logical step, Eurocentric frameworks then begin to operate from previous described *deficit models*. *Afrocentricity* mandates consideration of the greater systemic (or communal) structures that have helped and hindered justice.

Last, this idea also extends beyond social relationships. Akinyela (1995) declares, “Communal Afrocentric ontology stretches beyond human relationships into the African relationship with nature, which humans from an Afrocentric perspective should be in harmony with” (p. 23). This concept, the idea of being in *harmony with*

rather than having *dominion over*, is another clear distinction for hegemonic ontology. In defining an Afrocentric research methodology, Reviere (2001) affirms this idea, stating, “The Afrocentrist must strive for the encouragement and maintenance of harmonious relationships between the groups” (p. 317).

Emphasis on the communal nature of *Afrocentricity* has not gone without its skeptics. Critics conjecture that embracing this tenet exemplifies the glorification of an Africa past (Howe, 1998; Walker, 2001). It should be noted that there is a legitimate concern in romanticizing traditional African values. Scholars must be careful not to allow what one wishes to be used in place of reality. However, considerable research and literature demonstrate that communal relationships are not romanticized visions of an Africa gone but rather a concrete reality of the lived black experience (Collins, 1991; Dixon, 1991; Mazama, 2001; Schiele, 1996).

As may be evident, this assumption will have profound effects when considering the application of *Afrocentricity* to research. Reviere (2001) attests that utilizing a communal framework “is an important test of the validity of Afrocentric research” (p. 720). If one is always a member of a constituted whole, what Karenga (1982) has termed a *person-in-community*, then this has a direct influence on the research and the researcher. By necessity, research becomes participatory-based, as the researcher (Karenga’s *person-in community*) cannot remove herself/himself from the community being researched.

Africans are subjects and not objects of destiny, history, and experience

Probably one of the more underexamined assumptions within *Afrocentricity* is the notion of *agency*. Molefi Asante (1999) pronounces, “Afrocentricity seeks agency and action” (p. 19). Rather than seeing African peoples as passive recipients of history, this assumption stresses their role in creating not only history but also

knowledge. This is, in many senses, an essential aspect of the discussion regarding Kemet. As Keto (1991) declares, “The Africa-centered perspective provides the type of history for people of African descent that makes sense of what they, rather than somebody else, went through” (p. 56). Analogous to other assumptions, *agency* pushes to the fore the accomplishments and experiences of African people. More importantly, by recognizing *agents* within historiography, a major transformation occurs from the Western canon that has sought to universally define and describe African realities.

The power of self-definition and self-determination are intricately connected to the Afrocentric assumption of *agency*. African people have re-taken control over various fields in which they are positioned to write their own history, complete their own research, and define themselves. Subsequently, the potential importance of *agency* becomes clear in the quest for liberation, or, as Asante (1988) claims, “Liberation is fundamentally a seizure of the instruments of control” (p. 31).

There has also been a proliferation of research and literature that validates the ability to present one’s own story (Chowdhury, 1997; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Asante (1999) best summarizes this idea by the following statement, “Afrocentricity is the relocation, the repositioning of the African in a place of agency where instead of being spectator to others, African voices are heard in the full meaning of history” (p. ix). Mills (1997) further articulates this argument and states,

If the epistemology of the signatories, the agents, of the Racial Contract requires evasion and denial of the realities of race, the epistemology of victims, the objects, of the Racial Contract is, unsurprisingly, focused on these realities themselves. (p. 109)

In other words, universalism presents the very real danger of denial and evasion. As such, African people and their history become the object of others’ inquiry. If we are to transcend this starting place, agency requires action. People of African descent do

not stand around waiting for history to happen. Yet, this has been the dominant model as espoused via Eurocentric universalism. According to this model, Professor James Turner states that Europe is seen as historic, while Africa is seen as prehistoric. That is, Africa's history exists only after the arrival of Europeans. The danger, as bell hooks (1992) writes, is that

Unless we transform images of blackness, of black people, our ways of looking and our ways of being seen, we cannot make radical interventions that will fundamentally alter our situation. (p. 7)

African values, culture, and epistemology are centered as the beginning of analysis

Asante (1988) professes, "An ideology of liberation must find its existence in ourselves" (p. 31). Thus, not only should the paradigm allow for agency, this agency must be centered within its community. And as evident by its name, Afro-centricity places strong emphasis on centering the values, culture, and epistemology of an African reality as the genesis for investigation. Keto (1991) writes,

The Africa-centered perspective of history rests on a unpretentious common sense premise that it is legitimate and intellectually useful to treat the continent of Africa as a geographical and cultural starting point, a "center" so to speak, that serves as a reference point in the process of gathering and interpreting historical knowledge about peoples of African descent throughout the world and people in Africa itself. (p. 1)

As with the previous assumptions, *centering* is a key fundamental assumption of the Afrocentric paradigm. This premise is also captured by use of other descriptors such as location, positionality, and placement.

The concept of centering does not refer to geography or physical space. Yes, Africa is the only continent intersected by the Equator, the Tropic of Cancer, and the Tropic of Capricorn. As Ali Mazrui (2001) once lectured, it is "almost as if the

Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, wanted to give unusual emphasis to centrality.”³²

Still, the notion of center refers to an epistemological, methodological, or experiential location.

West (1994) states,

Afrocentricity is a mechanism for African people to come to know themselves, their history and the world through their African eyes first; eyes that mirror and reveal themselves; eyes that center on themselves; eyes that see, evaluate, analyze and critique an African experience from the perspective of Africa’s descendants. (p. 30)

Thus, *centering* simply means that when investigating or researching people of African descent, their realities need to be at the center. Bekerie (1994) states, “The conceptual term *Afrocentricity* is made up of African and center. Whereas Africa is a collective and plural term encompassing diverse cultures and experiences, center is a claim to place” (p. 132). In other words, one does not have to be located in Africa to be Afrocentric. Similarly, one does not have to be African to be Afrocentric. Under the auspices of this assumption, one needs to consciously position or locate African realities as the center of investigation. It becomes, in essence, a frame of reference, a location, a *claim to place*.

Critics have asked, If *Afrocentricity* refutes Eurocentric notions of centrality, how can it promote its own? Keto (1991) answers this by saying, “We can legitimately argue that different regions of the world as centers that have evolved distinctively diverse cultures are entitled to develop paradigms based on the perspectives of the region’s qualitatively significant human cultures, histories and experiences” (p. 20). Keto has described this as *polycenters* and *multicenters* (Keto, 1991, 1995). Since *Afrocentricity* is a nonhegemonic paradigm, the center of *Afrocentricity* does not seek

³² Mazrui, A. (24 January 2001). Personal lecture notes, AS&RC 501: Global Africa.

to be the center for all people. *Afrocentricity* does not seek to describe other people's experience from this center. Rather, it allows for multiple centers.

The concept of *centering*, or locating oneself, places *Afrocentricity*'s biases and assumptions in plain view (without the veil). Evaluations, explorations, reviews, and research all operate with admitted political focus. In this way, work becomes clearer because the assumptions are explicit.

Centering has also been accused by some of being too limiting. The very definition of *centeredness*, it can be claimed, necessitates a periphery. In this manner, *Afrocentricity* is likened to Eurocentricity in terms of a perceived inability to achieve inclusion. However, Collins (1991) dismisses this critique: "Far from being a narcissistic or trivial concern, this placement of self at the center of analysis is critical for understanding a host of other relationships" (p. 104). Collins further contends that centering the self does not necessitate marginalizing others.

What are the benefits and limitations of *centering* in *Afrocentricity*? Undoubtedly, *centering* opens up the possibility, and the question, of insider status. It may provide a vantage point for clearer and more thorough investigation. Because centering requires a political and intellectual action, Asante (1999) writes,

Afrocentrists tend to be well-trained scholars who are convinced that in order to understand the African world, African phenomena in the West, and African history, it is more constructive to locate oneself in a centered position and view African Afrocentrically, that is, from a stand point of African agency. (p. 95)

Asante (1988) also adds that centering "becomes the source of regeneration of our values and beliefs" (p. 39). However, its ultimate value lies in what Keto (1991) has outlined. Keto (1991) writes, "The Africa-centered perspective helps us to re-evaluate words, concepts and phrases that are usually bandied about without an appreciation of their historical roots and their association to unequal global power alignments" (p. 58).

Holistic approaches to knowledge

Asante (1999) writes, “Interdisciplinarianism is one of the primary principles in the Afrocentric method” (p. xiii). Reviere (2001) equally purports that a holistic approach is “important and traditional in African cultures and necessary for the proper and more complete construction and interpretation of knowledge” (p. 711). In this way, Afrocentric methodology does not distinguish between *traditional* disciplines.

Departmentalization is seen as yet another way to create barriers between institutions and people and challenges the assumption of communality and kinship discussed previously. Where Western methods fragment (separate) learning and fields, *Afrocentricity* recognizes and affirms their interconnectedness. In this manner, a singular discipline cannot define *Afrocentricity*. Rather, its holistic nature places it firmly as a metatheory or a “meta-paradigm” (Mazama, 2001). It is this inclusion of multiple perspectives and infusion of disciplines that free the Afrocentric paradigm from the liabilities of other frameworks.

Thus, *Afrocentricity* is more than a singular presumption. It expands beyond any singular theory or framework to encompass the very notion of lived experience and reality. It would follow, then, that *Afrocentricity* is inclusive of numerous fields of study. For example, history, political science, sociology, philosophy, methodology, cultural studies, and many others all find themselves operating from under, within, and alongside the theoretical framework of *Afrocentricity*. It positions each of these disciplines within an African reality and uses this reality as the foundation of their *collective framework*. Consequently, historians, political scientists, philosophers, ethnographers, chemists, and medical practitioners and so on can all operate from an Afrocentric paradigm.

An additional strength is the ability to explore and view phenomena in context. Whereas traditional methods compartmentalize and segment information,

Afrocentricity seeks to understand phenomena in their entirety. Thus, events and actions are not viewed outside of the necessary context.

Afrocentric Assumptions Summary

The seven assumptions above give shape to *Afrocentricity*. Given the context of the above discussion, and upon reexamination, a slightly modified assemblage of Afrocentric assumptions emerge if one is to employ *Afrocentricity* as a research methodology. There is one last assumption that is often assumed, but which needs to be openly acknowledged—the use of political utility toward justice. This assumption arises from many of the others already discussed. However, some fleshing-out may provide additional insight.

Plainly speaking, an Afrocentric paradigm is purposely political. In his article “Rethinking Afrocentricity,” Akinyela (1995) states that *Afrocentricity* “seeks to break down the dualistic divisions between cultural discourse and political discourse” (p. 37). In other words, and much like the work of feminist theorists, *Afrocentricity* operates from a framework that asserts that the personal and the political cannot be separated. Even while Eurocentricity attempts to deny the influence of its political utility, *Afrocentricity* acknowledges its presence. This distinction is best demonstrated by the oft-quoted Western colloquialism, “It’s business, not personal.” An Afrocentric paradigm cannot make this differentiation. It views interactions, decisions, and relationships as being simultaneously personal and political (i.e., business). If, as Mazama (2001) contends, “Afrocentricity is indeed a true paradigm for African liberation” (p. 404), then an Afrocentric paradigm states that we must employ this political utility toward paths of justice.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

Afrocentric Research Methods

While the scholarship debating the contours of an Afrocentric framework is vast, there is, to date, a limited amount of literature outlining the main tenets of *Afrocentricity* as research methodology. Fortunately, there is sufficient theorizing to articulate key components (Akinyela, 1995; Mazama, 2001; Milam, 1992; Stewart, 1998). Jerome Schiele's (1996) scholarship reduces many of the commonalities of an Afrocentric research methodology to three major assumptions. For Schiele (1996) these are the following:

- (1) Human identity is a collective identity; (2) the spiritual or nonmaterial component of human beings is just as important and valid as the material component; (3) the affective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid. (p. 286)

Schiele's assumptions are concise and figure prominently in this project's research design. However, the five canons as delineated by Ruth Reviere (2001) have best captured the components of an Afrocentric research methodology.

According to Reviere (2001), "the more appropriate and reasonable criteria by which to judge research" (p. 711) include the following five canons: groundedness of research in the experiences of the community being researched (p. 713), consideration of how knowledge is constructed (p. 716), concept of justice as a requirement for legitimate research (p. 717), rejection of the researcher/participant separation (p. 719); and use of a research procedure that is mindful of the welfare of all participants (p. 720). Each will be briefly expanded upon below and directly connected to the purpose and design of this research project.

Groundedness of Research

Grounding the research in an Afrocentric paradigm is primarily accomplished by *centering*. Mazama (2001) writes, “the concept of center (also location, place) occupies, as it could have been expected, a critical place in the Afrocentric conceptual apparatus” (p. 397). More specifically, Afrocentric methods require that “any analysis must be conducted from the perspective of the people studied, from their center, to actualize them as ‘subjects’ rather than ‘objects’” (Stewart, 1998, p. 309). For this project, grounding the research in the experiences of black students is “a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data” (Reviere, 2001, p. 712).

Knowledge Construction

One of the primary assumptions of an Afrocentric research methodology revolves around the process of knowledge production. Beyond challenging the hegemony of Eurocentric universalism and epistemology, Afrocentric research methods acknowledge that knowledge creation is “a highly contextual activity” (Reviere, 2001, p. 718). Accordingly, Milam (1992) argues, “Afrocentric researchers pay attention to symbols, affect, instinct, intuition, and imagery as multiple ways of knowing” (p. 10). These ways of knowing also include the use of orality—or *nommo* (Asante, 1988). Cummings and Roy (2002) contend,

[T]hrough the creative power of the spoken word . . . *nommo* goes beyond the mere use of words, phrases or linguistic conventions. It also signifies the generating and sustaining powers of language that inform every facet of African American life. (pp. 62–63)

This project’s use of qualitative research—interviews with black students—was an epistemological employment of *nommo*. The use of orality is also exemplified by the equity timeloop found in Chapter 6. By affirming affective approaches to knowing,

Afrocentricity “has the potential to involve a radical departure from the nature of knowledge, the role of culture, and the reality of oppression” (Milam, 1992, p. 1).

Concept of Justice

Afrocentric research methodologies readily acknowledge that “cultural liberation cannot bypass political economy” (Chowdhury, 1997, p. 52). In this way, research “must generate knowledge that will free us and empower us” (Mazama, 2001, p. 399). For this project, the explicit goal was to generate research aimed at the elimination of racial disparities in Ithaca schools. It openly works toward educational empowerment. And yet, this concept of justice is twofold. The use of Afrocentric research methods should not only encourage knowledge construction for liberation but also measure justice by “the fairness of its procedure and the openness of its application” (Reviere, 2001, p. 717). Thus, the concept of justice also requires researchers to pay particular attention to the well-being of research participants.

Rejection of Researcher/Participant Separation

In Afrocentric research methods, the rejection of the researcher/participant separation frequently situated in the need for and the importance of *community* (Asante, 1990; Milam, 1992). Reviere (2001) argues that “by insisting that the personal and the theoretical are inseparable, the researcher is, in fact, compelling the reader to search for the layers of subtexts beyond what has actually been revealed, to come to a more complete understanding of the meaning of the data presented” (p. 715). This is not to argue that the researcher and participants are one or that they share lived experiences. Rather, it opens the possibility that researchers and participants may share interests. More directly, Afrocentric research methods argue that these shared interests are not enough to render research flawed. This project harbors no illusions

regarding the vested interest of the researcher as a member of the research and the researched community.

Welfare of Participants

The last of the five canons as outlined by Reviere (2001) necessitates a “research procedure that is fair to all participants” (p. 720). Too frequently, well-intended research has made black students “the objects but rarely the beneficiaries of research” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 271). If policy reforms are to be effective, social scientists must cease imposing conclusions and recommendations on research subjects. Reviere (2001) argues that Afrocentric research methodologies should “push the inquiry into a higher realm where the methodology and the process of knowledge construction cease to take precedence over the well-being of the people being researched” (p. 709). From decisions about confidentiality, to the construction of interview questions, to the data analysis, concern for the welfare of the participants was of particular importance.

Qualitative Research

Employing the five canons as outlined by Reviere (2001), this research project was also conducted using many of the practical frameworks from within qualitative research methods. More specifically, the use of interviewing was consistent with and supported by Afrocentric research methods. Still, Milam (1992) warns that the simple use of qualitative interviews does not guarantee Afrocentric research. There is, nonetheless, solid synergy between the two methodologies and value in using them in tandem. Denzin and Lincoln (2000), editors of what many consider to be the definitive text in the field, define qualitative research as the following:

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field . . . It is multipragmatic in focus . . . sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach . . . committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. (p. 576)

In their own respective developments, qualitative and Afrocentric research methods have fought many of the same intellectual battles. For qualitative research, this includes important engagements over reflexivity (Salzman, 2002), the existence of objectivity (Greene, 1997), and the consequences of representation (Fine, 1994). As a result, the methodology for this project would most accurately be described as a qualitatively Afrocentric research methodology.

Critique of Objectivity

In any research project, it is important that the myth of *objectivity* in the knowledge creation process be summarily addressed. Fortunately, both qualitative and Afrocentric research methods are concerned with prospects of researcher detachment. Loosely speaking, objectivity proposes that researchers have an ability to become neutral conduits carrying out science. Objectivity is said to allow a researcher to safeguard his or her research and his or her methodology from bias and outside influence. This is not the case for this project, and “there should be no pretense of scholarly objectivity or detachment” (Milam, 1992, p. 15).

Collins (1991) reminds us that all epistemologies represent “the standpoints and interests of their creators” (p. 14). In fact, there is a long tradition of exploring “the connection of knowledge and interest” (Habermas, 1971, p. 317). Despite hundreds of years and protracted debates to the contrary, “knowledge . . . is now widely accepted as a subjective process, fraught with interference from societal baggage that the researcher brings to the activity” (Reviere, 2001, p. 714). Attempts by traditional research methods to deny the interplay of mitigating factors (race, gender, sexuality,

etc.) deny the inherent political nature of knowledge creation. According to Fine (1994), “once out beyond the picket fence of illusory objectivity we trespass all over the classed, raced, and otherwise stratified lines” (p. 80). In this way, objectivity has been used as “a tool of repression” (Akinyela, 1995, p. 24).

While arguing against *objectivity*, qualitative inquiry does not turn to its opposite, *subjectivity*. Rather, qualitative researchers turn to *reflexivity*. In its most basic definition, reflexivity is “the constant awareness assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher’s own contributions/influence/shaping of intersubjective research and the consequent research findings” (Salzman, 2002, p. 806). In other words, researchers should constantly reflect on why and how they are vested in their research. This is particularly necessary for qualitative interviewing, as the interviewer “is implicated in the data by virtue of the fact that he or she asks questions about the process of social research and interprets the ensuing answers in a manner that unavoidably will be influenced by his or her own presuppositions about the very process that is being asked about” (Bryman & Cassell, 2006, p. 46).

In this regard, reflexivity is also an inherent aspect of Afrocentric research methodologies. Milam (1992) argues for a researcher’s need “to examine herself or himself in order to understand the concept of location” (p. 15). Reviere (2001) adds that “retrospection and introspection are important elements” (p. 715). Thus, rather than strive for objectivity, it is incumbent upon researchers to explore their personal biases and interests as part of a process that “allows us to do better research” (Salzman, 2002, p. 807).

Validity and Trustworthiness

Seidman (1998) writes, “many qualitative researchers disagree with the epistemological assumptions underlying the notion of validity” (p. 17). This is not to

say that research projects are not subject to conversations about trustworthiness or credibility (Milam, 1992; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). In fact, in talking about his own qualitative research, the influential sociologist John Ogbu (1992) warns,

We have learned that it is not sufficient to take parents' and children's verbal responses to questions about educational aspirations, attitudes, and behaviors at face value. (p. 291)

Ogbu's caution is well noted. As with most data sets, bias is present, and the trustworthiness of qualitative data is not granted by merely pronouncing it so. Frequently, researchers are encouraged to develop models of triangulation—"the simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 6). In other words, one of the measures of trustworthiness and credibility places research alongside additional pieces of data. By utilizing multiple data sets, trustworthiness can be enhanced.

For this project, traditional notions of qualitative triangulation are not present. An argument can be made that the construction of the local *timeloop* (Chapter 6 and Appendix 5) constitutes an extensive document review. Other arguments can also be made that the time I spent working in and observing local schools as well as my role in facilitating student focus groups constitute other pieces of a qualitative data set. However, beyond the manner each has informed this work, multiple qualitative data sets are not officially represented in this study.

Chenail (1997) states that triangulation usually refers to researchers' use of "different sets of data, different types of analyses, different researchers, and/or different theoretical perspectives to study one particular phenomenon" (para. 3). While this research utilizes three different approaches to examine racial disparities in Ithaca schools (national literature review, local historical investigation, and student interviews), it has only one solid qualitative data set. This is a limitation that will be

addressed later in the chapter, but it is also theorized that this limitation does not irreparably jeopardize the study's validity, credibility, or trustworthiness.

Milam (1992) reminds researchers/scholars that they are “accountable both to disciplinary peers and to larger communities” (p. 20). Despite the necessary attempts to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, determinations about validity cannot be determined by so-called experts. If one is to produce solid research, then triangulation, trustworthiness, and credibility are valid concerns. However, and ultimately, any research findings and recommendations “must be validated by the community that is the subject of the inquiry” (Reviere, 2001, p. 720). In essence, it will be up to the local black community to judge the validity of this research project.

Research Design

By utilizing aspects of qualitative research methods along with the key components of Afrocentric research methods, this project was constructed as a means to center the experiences of black students as an integral knowledge source. It was theorized that interviewing black students—along with seeking an understanding of the sociohistoric context of these experiences—would be the most appropriate course in formulating educational policies. As a result, two major research questions guide this project:

1. What do black students say about their educational experiences?
2. What policies can be formed from the narratives of black students?

Sample Design

Conceptually, the sampling for this research combined *theory-based sampling* with *purposeful sampling*. *Theory-based sampling* defines a subgroup around a theoretical construct. The goal, as Patton (1990) writes, is to sample “incidents, slices

of life, time periods, or people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs . . . the sample becomes, by definition, representative of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 177). The theoretical construct in this case was based on *Afrocentricity*, and the sample was identified as black students in the Ithaca community. In *purposeful sampling*, the researcher is able to “describe some particular subgroup in depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 173). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also contend, “In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations” (p. 202). Though potentially small in numbers, the depth and diversity of interviews can create strong data sets.

Given the voluntary and potentially sensitive nature of the research, a number of approaches were utilized in order to encourage participation. One of the primary challenges was to find culturally respectful approaches to recruit students from the black community. An essential step in this process was to work with local community centers, youth programs, and school personnel. Additionally, word-of-mouth recruitment and e-mails were directed to specific distribution lists as a way to reach caregivers and parents of possible participants. Parental consent and child assent forms are located in the Appendix (See Appendix 2 and Appendix 3).

Beyond the opportunity to “get stuff off their chests” (p. 134), Peel, Parry, Douglas, and Lawton (2006) note that people frequently choose to participate in qualitative research for altruistic motives. Still, this study also used a monetary inducement to encourage participation. Students were compensated with a twenty-dollar gift card to local book and media stores. This was designed as a “thank you” for participants’ time and for the sharing of their expertise. It was not unlike a small honorarium. Thus, while part of the goal was to help with recruitment, the monetary inducement was in place to validate and acknowledge students’ knowledge. Last, all students accepted the inducement to participate. Some did so eagerly. Others were

hesitant, or outright refused. One way to interpret this behavior is that the monetary inducement did not necessarily influence the decision to participate.

Data Collection

Data collection took the form of *semistructured interviews*. Seidman (1998) writes, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). The *interview guide approach* as outlined by Michael Patton (1990) also helped to facilitate data collection. In this approach, “the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style—but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (p. 283). Accordingly, participants were asked the same basic set of questions, though not necessarily in the same order, nor with the same wording. Questions were developed to elicit responses that would connect to educational policy. A sample of the semistructured questionnaire is included as Appendix 4.

Additionally, the level of flexibility that is present in the *interview guide approach* allowed participants to more fully and freely describe their individual experiences. This method of data collection also allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions tailored to each individual interview. Given the age of the intended sample population, some aspects of a conversational approach to interviewing enabled better data collection.

Seidman (1998) argues that 90-minute interviews are optimal but concedes that for younger participants, “a shorter period may be appropriate” (p. 14). Each interview in this study was scheduled for one hour, and actual interview times ranged from 45 minutes to over 90 minutes. Each interview began with students talking about themselves, and each participant was asked to describe his or her interests, outside

activities, and hobbies. Participants were also asked to describe their school—including likes and dislikes. The interviews then went in various directions, as influenced by students' responses. In general, students were eager to talk and more than willing to share their ideas and their experiences.

Interviews occurred in multiple locations. Some interviews were conducted at my campus office, some at local community centers, and others at the homes of participants. For each interview, the participant selected the location, and all spaces provided a quiet, confidential location.

It is also important to mention the existence of prior relationships for some interviewees. Given my involvement in schools and community organizations, I had worked with and/or known some of the participants. While this obviously influenced the tone and tenor of particular interviews, this usually facilitated better data collection. Familiarity with specific situations, events, and schools provided valuable context to many of the students' voices.

Participants

A total of eleven black students participated in the project, including six young women and five young men. Unfortunately, a technical error prevented an audible recording for one interview. As a result, the final sample includes ten students—evenly split along gender lines. Participants ranged from 16 to 19 years of age. Participants had shared interests in drama, basketball, biology, community service, skateboarding, education, and hip-hop. Half of the participants were enrolled in honors and Advanced Placement classes. Half of the participants were enrolled in “at risk” programs or what others have better described as “at promise” programs (Boykin, 2000). Three of the participants had attended schools in the Ithaca, NY, district for their whole educational experience. The others had transferred into the Ithaca district

from other cities, states, or countries—three began attending Ithaca schools in elementary school, two in middle school, and two at the start of their high school careers. Five graduated from Ithaca schools. Five did not. All students were attending public secondary schools in Ithaca at the time of interview. In short, the ten interview participants reflected the diversity among black students in Ithaca schools and served as a solid sample population from which to draw conclusions about their experiences and about educational policy.

Names have been changed to help protect the identity of participants. Names were assigned randomly from a list of *most common names* created by the New York City Health Department.³³ Additionally, in some cases no name is attached to a participant quote. This is done when demonstrating repetition of responses or when there is a concern that the quote might contain identifiable information. In such cases, this is done only to ensure participant anonymity.

Additional Data Collection

While writing this study, I assisted with the editing of a film centered on black/brown students in Ithaca schools. As part of a grant project for the *Village at Ithaca*, there were six-plus hours of video footage with an additional fifteen students responding to many of the questions found in Appendix 4. The 42-minute final version includes conversations with black and Latino/a students about their experiences in Ithaca schools. While not directly addressed in the results, this video is included in the timeloop appendix. It is mentioned here because the work of dissecting six hours of video footage, along with the creation of the video's subtitles, influenced how I came to understand and analyze the audio transcripts.

³³ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (2007). Most Popular Names by Race/Ethnicity. Found at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/public/press08/pr069-08-babynames.pdf>

Data Analysis

Reviere (2001) reminds researchers, “To analyze data obtained from an Afrocentric inquiry, the researcher must judge the data against the Afrocentric canons” (p. 722). As a result, analysis emerged from the data within the context of an informed Afrocentric perspective. Data analysis followed an “inductive approach” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 1990). The goal of this method is to ensure “that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; [that] they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1990, p. 391). The first step was to look for recurring themes, followed by coding and prioritizing of key patterns.

A key step in the data analysis was the transcription process. Reviewing the interviews, both audibly and literally, created a high level of familiarity with the data set. Even while it has been argued that “interviewers who transcribe their own tapes come to know their interviews better” (Seidman, 1998, p. 98), naturally, some of the nuance is lost in transcription. Thus, each interview was coded once prior to transcription. Listening to the audio recording while cataloguing key concepts and quotations was a crucial step in the data analysis and assisted in identifying portions of the interview that may have been lost in verbatim transcripts. After completion of all verbatim transcripts, a matrix was created that collated each response to similar questions. This helped in identifying themes of convergence, divergence, and linkages (Patton, 1990, p. 402). Last, whereas Riehl (2001) states that qualitative researchers “analyze their data in nonmathematical ways” (p. 15), there are instances when numbers can highlight data in unexpected ways. Simple mathematical formulations and word counts added complexity to the data set and are part of this data analysis.

Limitations

A clear limitation of this study can be attributed to my growing proficiency as an interviewer. Seidman (1998) warns, “the hardest work for most interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively” (p. 63). The transcripts contain clear examples when I did not actively listen. There are places in the transcripts where I should have asked for more or asked questions differently. There are also instances of leading and poorly constructed questions. The following exchange with Aaliyah is instructive. Here we are discussing the role of race in forging relationships with teachers.

SEB: Do you ever think that race plays a small part that—in terms of those connections that students are able to make with teachers?

Aaliyah: Well yeah, from my perspective, I’ve always grown up in a predominately white setting. It’s never—um—I guess I’m used to dealing with all white teachers. It might not be necessarily super comfortable and I think I would be more comfortable with a black teacher. Um, but outside of my perspective—yeah, I imagine a black kid who tried to—who came from a different setting, trying to communicate with all white teachers would be tough. And, there’s always that barrier between races.

SEB: What about notions of expectations—from your experience, do you think teachers expect—or have different expectations for black students?

Aaliyah: Yep. I mean I um—you know I never um—obviously I guess I’ve never talked about this with any teachers. Um—

SEB: Would it be an interesting conversation [smile]?

Aaliyah: Yeah, it would [laugh]. I mean you often wonder that—you know when you don’t necessarily make the best grades in the class—or you do. Um. You know I think that a lot of teachers have never really experienced that many black students in the class first of all—especially the higher level classes. Um, so they’re sort of trying to redefine what black kids can do.

In this small passage, there are compounding errors for an interviewer. I err by asking double questions, asking dichotomous questions, asking leading questions, and by not asking any follow-up questions on some of the richer statements (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1998). All of these errors are found in this small sample. Some of the concerns are a natural result of a conversational approach. However, there are places in the transcripts—such as above—where interview skills change the data. Seidman (1998) writes, “effective questioning is so context-bound, such a reflection of the relationship that has developed between the interviewer and the participants, that to define it further runs the risk of making a human process mechanical” (p. 78). While not mechanical, interviewing skills can be crafted and honed. Fortunately, there is marked improvement as interviews progressed. Still, this should not eliminate the reader’s responsibility to more carefully and consider student responses.

Another limitation to consider is the sample size. According to the ICSD state report card, there were approximately 135 black students attending public high schools during the 2003–04 academic year. The ten interview participants equate to approximately 7.5% of this subset population. As a result, more interviews would be a positive addition to the data. Still, qualitative research prefers quality to quantity (Patton, 1990). In deciding how many participants are sufficient, Seidman (1998) writes, “‘enough’ is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different for each study and each researcher” (p. 48). The ten interview transcriptions produced over 300 pages and 60,000 words of typed text. Most importantly, and while more interviews would strengthen the data set, I believed the range of perspectives and diversity of experiences expressed by participants led to positive determinations of informational sufficiency and saturation (Seidman, 1998). This range and diversity make it likely that “others outside the sample may have a chance to connect to the experiences of those in it” (Seidman, 1998, p. 48).

Last, this project is open to the critique of a singular qualitative data set. Absent are observational field notes, focus groups, survey results, and other traditional qualitative sets of data. However, this project is also conceived as being qualitatively Afrocentric. Thus, the construction and inclusion of the equity timeloop—both in Chapter 6 as well as the appendix—offers a solid triangulation point. Radio interviews, student videos, community forums, and other resources were critically analyzed. In other words, the voices of black students have been explored throughout Ithaca’s history and helped to inform data analysis. Additionally, my involvement with community organizations whose charge is to eliminate educational disparities, my facilitation of staff development trainings, my preparation for educational lectures, and my role/responsibility as a parent offer additional perspectives to measure the student interviews.

Triangulation in qualitative research is important because it “involves the careful reviewing of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct” (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006, p. 46). In this light, the current research project takes a historic and holistic approach to not only the data set but also the problem phenomenon.

Generalizability

Generalizability serves as yet another possible limitation (Patton, 1990; Silverman, 2000). Frequently, qualitative research projects use pseudonyms to assist with the ability to make generalizations. Walford (2005) argues that the use of such pseudonyms offer “spurious generalizability” (p. 90) in educational research. Wolfe (2003) further argues,

The tendency to venture closer to fiction than fact characterizes most books that hide the real names of the places they study. It is not that researchers deliberately distort. The problem, instead, is that the newly invented place takes on a life of its own, as if it, and not the real town, is under investigation. (para. 12)

This project, however, sought to purposely name Ithaca. Its potential lies not in generalizability but in its specificity. Its potential is determined by a particular context, at a particular moment in time, and in a specific community. Generalizing the results may or may not be possible. It is not the primary goal. This process is not unlike Ogbu's (2003) work in the Shaker Heights, OH, community or the research conducted by member schools of the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN).

If any generalizations are to be made, it will be within the context of black students in high-rated suburban districts—and more specifically in college or university towns of academic excellence. The research of MSAN offers some comparative samples. Additionally, Dr. Ron Ferguson, a lead MSAN researcher, has conducted the Tri-Pod survey in Ithaca schools (Ferguson, 2002, 2007). Still, Patton (1990) suggests that qualitative researchers forgo *generalization* and begun to make data *extrapolations* that are context- and content-specific. These extrapolations, similar to the conversation about validity, should be “informed by the actual and aspired interests of the community” (Reviere, 2001, p. 720).

CHAPTER 5:

RESULTS

In his book *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, Harry Wolcott (1990) states,

My assessment of qualitative studies in education is that they reveal a tendency toward heavy-handed or intrusive analysis, particularly among educational researchers who feel they not only know their educator audiences but know what is best for them. Informants in their accounts do little talking; the researcher does a lot. Every reported observation or quotation seems to prompt comment or interpretation on the part of the research (now turned theorist), something like the chatty guide who becomes rather than gives the tour—and assumes that, without such a monologue, we would not know what to think. (p. 29)

To avoid confirmation of Wolcott's assessment, this chapter will include a number of instances in which participants do all the talking. Rather than assume the reader knows *what* to think, this format simply assumes the reader *will* think.

Throughout the ten interviews, there are a number of similarly worded questions asked of all participants. When this occurs, the results are shared by presenting a list of participant responses without interviewer prompts. Presenting the results chapter in this way has the potential to disrupt the narrative for some readers. However, the goal is to create a student narrative from the participants' responses.

As an introduction to the results, the format, and, most importantly, the students, it is best to do so by example. Below are the collated participant responses to the question "What does it mean to be a black student at your school?"

Shania: Typical black student has three different lives. Three different lives to live. One at school, one at home, and they have one with their friends. And, sometimes the drama with your friends comes into school, like if you and your friends are outside of school something happens and it, like, more and more it comes to school and it spreads out.

- Brandon: [Pause] A black student at my school . . . Um [Pause] I think it means, you know, just to go through the day, you know, try to stay out of trouble.
- Aaliyah: Yeah. Um, um, well yeah. Isolation I guess is a good word. You may hear that a lot. But um, from my perspective—you know I'm in relatively high classes. Um, so that puts you in a situation where you are the minority. And you have to you know, I hate to say this, but deal with it. Um, you have to deal with white on black interaction. So there's a lot of sort of, or for me anyway, artificial comfort.
- Jayden: It means a lot—I'm saying—for some people being a black student you can have a lot of popularity at the school. But then sometimes—with different other groups—you can be an enemy. It's all good I guess.
- Brianna: This is one thing, I wasn't like characterized as a black student because I was in the top—which is really horrible and messed up. But, 'cause I was in good classes, I did extracurricular activities like and that weren't necessarily sports. So people didn't view me as black, and I know that I got in like a lot of fights with people like—they would say me or like [my friend] or [my friend] like we weren't really black because we were aspiring to be more than what they wanted us to be.
- Elijah: You sit there, work hard, you study, you do sports ya know, if you're in sports ya know, do whatever it takes to get out of school. Or you just give into all the bull crap that you have to go through, and you don't study, and ya know, you go out and party every night and do whatever ya know. You just drop out completely, or ya know you can drop out and get your GED. That way, I mean, at least you're still doing something. Instead of not doing anything at all.
- Isaiah: To be a black student . . . well, from my perspective . . . most black students, well, black students have to work harder than other students cuz—cuz the white students have it easier. Cuz they could do something bad but get away with and go—go back to the way things were.
- Jada: I think my experience has been unique because—um—I don't think I really fit into the mold of what people expect of a black student at [school]. I think they expect them to take all regents classes, not—not to do academically well and I think it's a little surprising to

teachers when they see me and I'm in their classes because I'm usually the only one [laugh].

Jordan: Um, the stereotype—like you automatically everyday, in the AP's office for sittin' wrong. And then people just—they just assume that you not—I think that they just assume that you not intelligent so they, they are on you more—like, you know, “do you get this?” and you know acting like you stupid and stuff.

The above responses were listed in no particular order. Nonetheless, presenting the responses without interpretation is an impossibility. As Seidman (1998) writes, “Even as interviewers question their participants, tentative interpretations may begin to influence the path of their questioning” (p. 110). An exchange between Kayla and me may exemplify Seidman's point. Here, Kayla and I are discussing what it means to be a black student.

SEB: From your perspective—umm—what does it mean to be a—a black student in your school?

Kayla: Not much. Eheh . . . I mean—I dunno. 'Cuz I don't know what it is like to be a white student.

SEB: [laugh] That's a very good point. Absolutely. Do you think it means anything at all—in your school? Or have there been experiences wher—

Kayla: Well sure! I think it means something when people come to school with KKK shirts on. Or—someone reads the N-word in a book and look backs at you—I think there's some . . . like of course—everyone realizes that I'm black and—maybe education is different for—I dunno—white and black students.

As is clear, interpretations of the results are partially predicated on what was asked and what was not asked. Additionally, a large degree of interpretation is reflected in the organization, selection, and presentation of participant accounts. The goal of this chapter is not to avoid interpretations—explicit or otherwise. Rather, the goal is to limit the *chatter*. The goal is to *center* the students' responses. As such, there will be

many instances in which responses run consecutively. Further analysis and relevant connections to educational policy will be addressed in Chapter 7.

Expected Results

Before going further, it is also important to openly acknowledge my expectations prior to conducting the interviews. My work with high school students trying to navigate educational institutions contained frequent conversations about strategies to counteract feelings of *isolation*. As a result, I expected to hear, and subsequently looked for, stories about *isolation*. This expectation result was quickly confirmed within the first couple of interviews. When Aaliyah and I talked about what it means to be a black student, she answered, “Isolation I guess is a good word. You may hear that a lot.”

Jordan did not talk of isolation, but he did express an awareness of being “the only one.” In this exchange, we were discussing how schools can best support black students.

SEB: Any other ideas about what schools should be doing to help black folks?

Jordan: [long pause] Just like making people feel comfortable. If you’re like in an environment, and you comfortable, I think you learn better. Cuz I’m in this class. It’s all like—yo, I know, it’s not racist but you just don’t feel comfortable. Like if you’s the only black person in that class, you know? I know that we the minorities or whatever but still—try to do suttin’ . . .

There is yet another example with Jada. Here we were discussing her experiences with being “the only one,” when the following exchange occurred:

SEB: And then you talked about being the only one in a lot of your classes. Is that a common experience throughout your education?

Jada: Yeah.

SEB: The only person of color or only black woman in most of your classes?

Jada: Yeah, Yeah. But I think that's just because of where I live. Like I lived in [suburb] and there weren't a lot of African Americans there [laugh] but I think if I lived in the south or if I lived in a major populated city, there would be more African Americans in my class. So that maybe that's not . . . maybe that's just how it is? But I think there's room for people to grow—and to join me. But yeah . . .

SEB: Absolutely—so are you aware of being the only person of color in your AP or honors classes?

Jada: Um, well I'm taking three classes. I'm taking AP English and I'm the only one. AP chemistry and I'm the only one. And AP French and I'm only one. [Laugh] SO, yeah, it's there. I think I—I focused on it way too much last year. And I'm just trying to get through the year—without becoming too overly involved in it. You know, there's always that thing in the back of your mind you know. Are they viewing what I have to say in the classroom as a—a representative of the black race—the whole thing or am I just me.

Last, there was also an exchange with Isaiah. In this instance, I introduced the topic of isolation, and Isaiah quickly responded.

SEB: And then sometimes I hear things about isolation. Like I feel like I'm the only—I'm the only black student in a class. And—

Isaiah: Oh yeah! I feel that cuz like I'm like the only black student every class I'm in.

SEB: Yeah, so you have that experience?

Isaiah: Yeah.

SEB: So can you tell me a little bit about that experience? I mean, what's—what's it like? What do you think about? What's—just tell me a little about that experience.

Isaiah: It's like—sometimes it's okay but other times when you're not sure about everything or you're not like really into the class, you can't

say something to another black person. Or like—that you can relate to them with. You can only—you can’t really say nuttin to anybody except to hold everything inside. Like, you can’t really say anything.

While there are many references to lack of comfort and a wish for more racial inclusivity, I did not, in fact, hear the word *isolation* frequently. The word is spoken only 5 times throughout 300 pages of typed transcriptions. Moreover, I was as likely as participants to introduce the topic of *isolation*. However, participants described other experiences—“segregated,” “being the only one”—but in reality, descriptions of isolation are a minor result. It is offered here as an example and open acknowledgement of how my research expectations impacted the research.

Curriculum

I had also anticipated hearing stories about the importance of curricular options. In point of fact, participant accounts included a number of responses related to curriculum. The most common revolved around the *relevancy* of the curriculum. Jordan stated the curriculum was a problem because “you goin be teaching a set—a bunch of like unnecessary stuff that people don’t need.” Shania said that her curriculum was “usually all white stuff—like learning about white people all the time.” She added, “Like you don’t learn about black mathematicians and black authors . . . There’s a lot of information out there that we’re not taught for whatever reason. But it would make school so much easier if it applied.”

There were numerous other references to curriculum. However, the best way to present these results is to collate the interviewee responses to the question “What courses or skills should schools teach?”

Brianna: Well, I think schools, I think that other . . . since America is becoming much more diverse, I think that diversity should be represented, in like the history courses and just the types of books

that you read and, I think that should be reformed in education. But I also think it, that it needs to be taken upon the family to actually, as well, to teach kids about themselves and where they come from.

Jordan: Aahh, just like stuff like—like my business handling and stuff like that. You know how to—you know how to self—well, not self-employed but you know—courses like that. Like, we want stuff like you know you gonna use it. Like some stuff they just teaching you—I really don't think you have a need for it after you graduate so—yeah—so, they need to update.

Elijah: [Whispering] Skills. Hmm. I think, I think the high school should be more lenient on teaching students life skills. Because, you know, after they get outta high school they, they're pretty much a grown man or a grown woman. And, you know, if they don't have life skills after they get outta high school, you know, they're gonna have to get a job, they're gonna have to get their own place, a car, you know to get around. They're gonna need life skills and I think they, the high school should really start teaching more about life skills. I know there's like health class but it's not really teaching you more about life and how to survive once you're outta high school and possibly going to college.

Jayden: Um, just teaching people more about life basically after high school. I'm saying, like I know most of the teachers been to college, so they should like maybe make up a class of their experiences and stuff. Have a lot of people from like [university] come down and talk about their experiences in college and stuff. That might be good 'cuz—I know I would probably be interested in learning that.

Isaiah: I think, like, having good people skills cuz after high school or college you're gonna have to go out in the world with nobody else. So, you're gonna have to work with many different people.

There were also references to the importance of knowing and teaching black history.

In pushing for black people to know their history, Brianna states, “But you don't learn about these things and I guess you pretty much learn that white is right—and you don't learn about the accomplishments of people that are like you and basically other than—if, based on like education, all you know is that black people were slaves and then there was the civil rights movement, and that's about it.” Isaiah commented, “I'd

like to learn more about black history because you don't hear about it most often except the one month we have . . . And there's gotta be times when you can fit in some black history more than it is now."

Last, there is this exchange with Shania, and my asking whether she was receiving a good education prompted me.

SEB: Do you think you're getting a good education?

Shania: [Long pause]. Yeah, yes and no. Because I feel that there are a lot of things that I would like to learn about but I don't learn about them.

SEB: Can you give an example?

Shania: I am over credits for graduation—I'm taking African American history this year for the last two semest—yeah, the last semester of school. I don't need the credit, but I was never thoroughly taught the African American history experience in school. I mean, they tell you about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks and stuff like that but they don't talk about the people that didn't make—they have like, they don't teach you about that so, I decided to take that class. That's me making my own personal statement about wanting to have a good education by taking an extra class that I don't need.

Unless specifically discussing the African American history course, nearly all participants talked of a curricular disconnect. It was very common to hear students discuss the ways in which their courses were not applicable to their lives—or from their perspectives, their futures.

Teachers

Fun, respect, encourage, concern, demanding, energetic. These are just some of the words participants used to describe their favorite teachers. Aaliyah said that her favorite teacher made "each student feel like they were powerful." Shania said, "She's just—she—personally—she's just a really good person—where she just has that 'it'

factor.” In talking about his favorite teacher, Jayden said, “I could relate to him because he sorta been through the things that I went through in life.” On the other hand, when conversations turned to least-favorite teachers—and/or least-favorite classes—the teacher’s lack of caring was the most frequently cited. When Kayla was asked why she had selected a certain class as her least favorite, she replied, “Because [the teacher] didn’t care about her students.” When pushed about his least-favorite class, Isaiah responded, “It’s just that she just doesn’t really care.”

A key component for participants was not just that teachers demonstrated caring and rigor, but that they also worked with students to encourage success. For Jordan, his favorite “encouraged me to keep going and like get my grade up.” The exchange between Brandon and me offers a similar idea:

SEB: So, what do you think makes a good teacher?

Brandon: [Pause] I think what makes a good teacher, is someone that wants you to do well. And that if they see you falling behind they’ll encourage you instead of trying to discourage you saying, “Maybe you should switch out of my class, maybe you should do something easier.” I like teachers that try to, um, challenge you to succeed instead of try to discourage you.

There is plenty more to say about the impact and importance of teachers. And while many of the interviewees focused on their relationships with faculty and staff, a theme began to emerge about the racial makeup of the faculty.

Black/Brown Teachers

When explicitly asked, “How can schools find better ways to support black students?,” Kayla didn’t hesitate to say, “Yep, more staff of color.” Shania stated that “more black staff would create a balance.” Other folks were directly asked about their

experiences with black teachers. When I asked Jada about her experiences with black teachers, it led to the following exchange:

SEB: Have you had any black teachers in your high school experience?

Jada: No. So, [laughter]. Yeah, nope.

SEB: So, do you think it's important?

Jada: I think it's *definitely* [enunciated] important. I think that would encourage a lot more kids to participate. Because I think if they know that someone is already at that status, and already is well respected, and just, just to be a real role model and encourage more. And, yeah, I should have thought about that—No, I haven't had a single African American teacher. So, I think, if you're always learning from the same batch—we're gonna call them the same batch—you get the same attitudes, the same thing. It would be cool—it would be cool.

When Isaiah was asked whether having black teachers is important, he responded:

Isaiah: I think it is cuz—cuz then maybe black teachers have different ways of teaching cuz they've been there before. And that they can—they help so the black students don't necessarily just leave them behind but they won't take it easy on them cuz they know they have to be hard on the them but also not to—not to assume that they're gonna be bad kids all the time.

In describing experiences—or lack thereof—with black faculty members, the participants began to reinforce themes about what makes a good teacher. Participants were looking for their teachers to be knowledgeable, funny, demanding, encouraging, and relatable.

How would you describe a good education?

Below are the collated responses to the question “How would you describe a good education?”

- Kayla: What's a good education? What's a good education? Uhhh—it's when you're interested in learning and someone is interested in teaching you.
- Jordan: Um, I dunno—basically just like—a good education—mmm—being successful. I don't know, like give me—like being successful, like when you graduate you have something to show that you did something in school.
- Elijah: A diploma.
- Jada: A good education? Huh, well that's a good question [laugh]. Um, a good education . . . um, I think you just have a body of knowledge and maintain a body of knowledge—I find often that a lot of classes that I've taken and I tried to think about the material and the following year, I can't remember half of it. And I think—uh—then I question, am I really capable of learning something or is it just that I'm able to recall information at the time when it's necessary but 20 years from now aren't I suppose to still know this stuff?
- Brandon: [Pause] I think a healthy learning environment and all the opportunities, you know, that would be out there for you. Like a school that offers a lot of academic opportunities like math help rooms and stuff like that. So if you do get an “F” it's no one's fault, 'cause all the opportunities are in front of you.
- Jayden: A good education? Mmm . . . grades, your grades is good. That means you have a good GPA—or average to have a good education. Job. There's a lot of different ways. From me—I would say grades.

Brianna and Isaiah were not asked to define a “good education” but rather were asked, “How would a student know if they were getting a good education?” Their responses are below:

- Brianna: I don't know, because, I don't think it's . . . I don't think you can really judge if you're receiving a good education based on like test scores. Because I know I don't do well on tests, but that doesn't mean that I'm not capable of learning and that I'm not like smart or intelligent, or anything like that. So, I really don't know how you would judge. I think it's just, each experience as you go on down the road lets you see if you received a good education. I think it's really hard to see it when you're in that moment, it's usually

afterwards—looking back from experiences that you have since then that you can figure it out.

Isaiah: If they were learning and actually if their—if their education's like improving like from years before. If they know the same thing they knew before and they haven't learned anything new then, they're not getting a good education.

And this exchange between Shania and me offers a representative summary of the participants' comments on a good education:

SEB: [H]ow would you describe a good education?

Shania: Good education—mmm, can you rephrase that?

SEB: Ah, how would—how would you know if you're getting a good education?

Shania: When you go home and you actually can talk to other people in your house about what you're learning. If you think about what you're learning in school when you're outside of school. If you can apply what you've learned in school to an outside school situation, you're getting a good education because it's carrying over to other parts of your life other than in school and in the classroom.

SEB: Do you think you're getting a good education?

Shania: [Long pause]. Yeah, yes and no. Because I feel that there are a lot of things that I would like to learn about but I don't learn about them.

While many of the participants were able to describe a good education, many were also unsure whether they were receiving a good education. This disconnect represented a key area of exploration.

How can schools find better ways to support black students?

Given the research design to connect student interviews to educational policy, students were directly asked, “How can schools find better ways to support black students?” The collated responses are listed below.

Jayden: They could be doin’ more to support all students. Not only black students.

Brandon: Um, there was a support system for black students and they got rid of it. It was [name]. I can’t remember, it was the Office of Minorities, Minority Affairs, something like that.

Isaiah: They’re supporting them to an extent. Like, this year, they said they’re gonna cut African and Latino Club which most black students go to. And what they kinda look forward to—but then they look to maybe black students in the sports and they don’t tell them like—ask them what they’re gonna do after high school. And they expect the same thing in the end—like they’re gonna do same thing like sit here and live in Ithaca.

Shania: [Pause]. I don’t know. I mean I think—I think there’s a lot of resources available to us. It’s just a matter of involving the black parents. A black child can only do so much for themselves in a white system. You need somebody to advocate for you if you’re not responsible and mature enough to do it for yourself. So, if the parents were more involved, I think that would help everything. Resources are there, you just need someone to help you get into them and find out like what’s there.

Elijah: Yeah. I mean . . . some, I think in the high school, ya know. That everyone, in some way is taught exactly the same. But I think that with black students, that it’s kinda different because ya know, they, I mean, ’cause from what I did a little bit of research on Ithaca. It seems like, for Ithaca High there is a much more higher rate of black students dropping out then there is graduating. And I think that if the school started to pay attention more to. Instead of like ya know, if they, because—or if they stop worrying about people that are more into, like . . . ’cause I think with the athletes. They, teachers slide for athletes. I mean, I think teachers do slide for athletes.

Brianna: [Pause] I think there are ways that they can. I don't know, I [pause]. I think that they should open up classes like accelerated classes to them, and I think, but it has to start in elementary school. It can't just start in high school, it has to start in elementary school. And I don't know . . . I guess, tell them they're better than just doing well and act like, um athletics. 'Cause I mean that's basically all.

Jada: Yeah, if you're not getting it at home, then definitely you should get emotional support probably from some counselors and stuff. 'Cuz, I think that's what kept me going. Because, I think you just tend to, um, I think you just give up sometimes and you just realize well, these white kids are all going to be the same. These black kids are all going to be the same. What am I even trying for? What am I—who am I helping? But, I guess, I'm helping my sister and maybe down the line she'll help somebody and—and we'll just see each other. I guess that's the goal because often times I think what am I doing this for? I'm obviously just doing this for myself and that's kind of selfish isn't it [laughing]. You know, you're working hard but are you working for financial reasons, to show other people—what you're made of and what you think other people are made of and that's what I'm trying to do. Even though I would like my sister a little more competitive at least it's showing her you're capable of this. You can surpass all that I've done. And maybe the next person will . . .

Aaliyah: Yeah. I think that they uh . . . more, I would hate to say enforcement, but em, more support groups. And I think people should—should really be sensitive to the distinctions within the black minority of the school. Um, and try to dissolve those as much as they can. 'Cuz I feel isolated not only from the white students, but also from most of the other black students at the school who aren't in—you know like the three students that are consistently AP classes, you know. So yeah, you know, support for different levels—I hate to say that—of academic interests and then also, you know, be more strict about—about having all the black students come together. You know what I mean? 'Cause I think that what's important in a school is to have people feel like they have a group. Um, which I can say I really don't have one at [my school] and it would be useful.

Kayla: Yeah—having more . . . easily having more staff of color! I think that would make a tremendous difference.

Jordan: Um, like, like putting in place more—'cuz most like history test—history is all like—mostly they just put in one unit on black people and focus—like two units. Alright, one, they focus on slavery, blah,

blah, blah. And then the other, they're like one or two great black people, yeah. Martin Luther King and stuff like that. And then it's back to you know Benjamin Franklin and stuff. You know. You know like they was great and they was racist and all that but they was great. So, I definitely think they should put like more you know black appreciation classes and not just focus in on slavery and King or whatever. But like the positive things that people did. More positive stuff.

Students had various ideas about and suggestions for how best to support black students. Many of the suggestions were anticipated—and many were not. However, common themes will be further extrapolated and discussed in Chapter 7.

Race and Racism

While I had expected some of the research results, I clearly underestimated the awareness and importance of *race* in students' lives. In fact, one of the most important results of this research involves the definitions of and experiences with racism. Participants were asked a variant of the question “When you hear the word *racism*, what does it mean to you?” The collated responses are listed below.

Shania: Racism to me doesn't have a color. I don't feel that it's a black and white issue. I feel that it's like a national issue. I think racism is just hidden for—for own personal reasons or for no reason at all just because you're different. Because there's plenty of black people, most of the black people in the high school are racist to each other because they don't like each other. Because she's wearing Jordan's and she's wearing Uptowns or this person acts white and talks white and usually labeled a white black person when you go to class and you do your work and you don't stop and socialize and be the typical thing that they expect you to be as a black person in the high school.

Jayden: Racism means to me—it's like a group, like when a group doesn't like another group basically.

Kayla: When white people hate black people.

Jada: I think—that's what I—I've been trying to figure that out because I think I try to link racism and prejudice together—and then it gets muddled, and then it's—I don't know if that's racism [laugh]—you just sort of think that way. I think it really comes down to whether or not you're recognize people as individuals or part—part of that group that's already been oppressed . . . I just think that racism is . . . I think you can see it in someone's eyes. It's just—it's that innate hatred of another person because of what they appear to represent. And if you just see how someone reacts towards you, or um, just that person who just shrugs you off and—and there's no other reason why they should . . . But I think I have to realize that not every person is this way, or—and I try to treat people as individuals. But when they say that one comment, [laugh] and you just know that in any other context that would be okay—but this is 2005, this is what we have; this is the baggage that we carry, that just isn't cool. You know? I can't really think of any really—good lines but . . .

Aaliyah: Racism . . . um, I think at this point it is hard to just point at someone and say they're racist. It's so taboo in American society. But for me, racism is still around and active—it's subtle. I think it just shows in the friends that you make, you know, acceptance for things, friendship groups, who asks you out where and that kind of thing. I think it's so subtle that it's sort of an instinct now to sense it out now.

Isaiah: Racism—ah, just being prejudice against somebody else's race or color or . . . yeah.

Brandon: I think it means when another race tries to ostracize and belittle another race.

After defining racism, participants were asked, “Do you think there is *racism* at your school?” Some of these responses are presented below.

Shania: I wouldn't really say it's racism anymore cuz we're like getting late in time, like 2005 now, and I wouldn't really label it as racism but there's definitely, it's like, you're this way or you're that way in the high school. . . . Racism to me doesn't have a color. I don't feel that it's a black and white issue. I feel that it's like a national issue. I think racism is just hidden for—for own personal reasons or for no reason at all just because you're different from you.

Kayla: Umm. I do because there has been like evidence of it. But I honestly think that if our school was racist that I'd be scared to go to school and I'm not. And I'm not scared to walk by those kids with the Dandy hats and all that so I don't . . . I just think it's like some power trip that they're going off of and the influence at home—so I don't think we have race issues in our school.

Jada: [Pause]—Maybe—it's probably prejudice I think. It's more prejudice and I think it has a lot to do with the parents. It's all the parents I think.

Jayden: Um, I think—well, when I was there I think there's a little bit cuz all the writings and graffiti I seen in bathrooms and stuff. So I would say yes, a little bit. But suttin that or not enough that can get handled by some people if they really wanted to. It could be done.

Brianna: Racism. [pause] Let's see. Racism means to me [pause] openly disliking or trying to hold someone back because of their race. Because, it's tricky because, I know that people can make—I found that people make racist comments or do racist things because they don't know any better. And they're ignorant to an experience, like they've never been around something from a different race. And they've never had to deal with, certain things. And I wouldn't be so quick to call them racist because their experiences have fueled the person that they have become. But there are some full out racists here in Ithaca and I think them knowing I guess about other races, and them knowing, they still play into the stereotypes that are connoted with certain races and they still think negatively of other races and they still think of themselves better than other races.

When asked if she thought racism existed at her school, Jada became somewhat reluctant to discuss.

Jada: Oh well, yeah. I myself haven't experienced it in a super concentrated. But last year they had issues. I wasn't there—I wasn't a student at the school but there's a large group of people who—or I think it was at least a few people who wore KKK outfit and there was a fight and then a large group of people came in the next day and supported those people. Um, so you know, it's obvious that there's still a lot of racial discrimination going on among students. um, [long pause] yeah—not a lot is coming out right now . . .

Brianna was not as reluctant. Here is an exchange between Brianna and me in which we discuss the possible presence of racism in her school:

SEB: Do you think there's racism in your high school?

Brianna: Yeah, there is and I think it's only getting worse actually. It's just kinda going down hill.

SEB: How do you know that there is racism in the high school, or why do you believe there is racism in the high school?

Brianna I believe there's racism in the high school just because of the way that it's so segregated there. And a majority of the time I was hanging out with the white people, but I could see it there. And like I think people viewed me as the exception as rather than just being part of a black race. They just viewed me as an exception to the black race. I was doing better in spite of the fact that I was black. And I think that's another thing, like, if you do well people think you're doing well in spite of who you are, like, kinda slipped through the cracks. Or it's because she's hanging out with white people that she's doing okay. Um. I don't know, I think in just the way that teachers would, you would see in the hallway teachers would talk. See the thing is . . . I, this doesn't apply to me because in certain aspects because, I was seen as a "good kid" [hand gestures] but if people, teachers thought you were a bad minority kid then you would get stopped in the hallway. And they would stop you and ask you. And I'd be like "oh don't you need to stop me?" and they're like "no, no, no, you're okay." But I could easily—yeah I look like innocent, but I could easily just be going to do some mischief. I mean I wasn't but. I think you got judged a lot about how you looked rather than how you were. And I think for a lot of minority students, I think, enough times somebody tells you one thing you just start playing into that role and I think that's what happens. And I know that I would get upset sometimes like just seeing some of the minority students acting up in the hallway and I'm thinking like I know around your parents you do not act like that—you do not, you know. But just when you get around here and your peers you think this is, well they're not going to accept me any other way. So this is the role I'm going to play into.

Isaiah believed that racism existed in his school but that it was a fine line.

SEB: Uh hum, do you think there's racism in your school?

Isaiah: Yeah, there's racism.

SEB: How do you know?

Isaiah: Cuz, it's, it's a fine line. There's the black kids. There's the—the hicks, who just live all the way out in [community] or just [community] and then there's the other white kids who just—are the—like who do all their work and then there's the rest of the people. So everybody's sort of separated. The hicks don't like the black people. Black people don't like the hicks. Everybody is—and that's what happened last year when like there was a big fight between some black kids and the hicks and it got all out of hand.

When Jordan was asked about what the word racism means to him, the following exchange occurred:

SEB: Ah, what does the word racism or what does racism mean to you?

Jordan: Stupid people. That's all I think about when I hear that word cuz, you know, they are people like—most time people just say oh, when you talk about racism it's white people. That's not it. There's lots of black people I know that, you know, don't like white people. And some—and you can't blame people for what—you know—others do. Like you can't put them in that category. Cuz I have white friends too and they cool. They're mad cool. Like you know. And some black people are like you can't—don't ever like let me see you walking with a white person or suttin like that—like what?

SEB: So, is there racism in your school?

Jordan: Definitely!

SEB: That was a quick answer. What do you mean—te—, tell me why? Or how do you know there is racism at your school?

Jordan: Well, there's—you really can't see it. You have to sit down listen to people. But you really can't see cuz everybody's friends with everybody like in some way or suttin like that. But then, as soon as something jumps off, it's like “Mmm, I hate that black girl” or “I hate that white boy.” “Mmm, you know I can't stand white people.” Or suttin like that.

The conversation between Elijah and me best illustrates interview conversations around race/racism. In this exchange, Elijah shares an experience rife with racism and when asked if he believes racism is in his school, the reply ends with “somewhere.”

SEB: When you hear the word racism, what does it mean?

Elijah: Hmm. Uhh. I could say that but I’m not going to.

SEB: Say what? What could you say?

Elijah: [laugh] A friend’s dad, but I’m not going there. That’s just, she was more than a friend. Her, um, I went to her birthday party. And her dad, has, besides her and her sister, has about 8 other kids. Me and my mom go up to her. Well, I get out of the car. He comes up and he straight up says, this what he said, he’s like, “I can’t believe my daughter is dating a *nigger*.” Ya know, and he says a couple other things. I have no idea what else he said after that. But, he said ya know, straight up. Right before she moved to Georgia and I moved here, she was like this is the last thing he ever said to her, “Ya know what, if I had a gun the day I saw you and that *nigger* together, I would’ve shot you both. Without regard.” And, ya know . . .

SEB: Pretty shocking language.

Elijah: That’s pretty much what I think is racism to me. I mean someone that could just, without care, just say—use that word towards someone they don’t even know. Ya know, just see ’em and be like oh well, “I can’t believe my daughter’s dating that *nigger*.” Or “I’ll shoot that nigger—blah, blah, blah.” Ya know, that’s racism to me.

SEB: Do you think there’s racism in your school?

Elijah: Heck yeah [laugh]. Heck yeah [laugh]. I know there is somewhere.

Race was a factor in other ways. Some talked of “acting black” or “talking white.” Others talked of experiences where people were “playing the race game.” Shania stated, “I mean, I know like with a lot of people you have to pretend—that’s where a lot of problems come in the high school—you have to pretend to be somebody

else in order to make like the staff like you.” Given the repeated stories, I asked Isaiah if he has had a class discussion about racism. Here is the exchange with Isaiah:

SEB: Have you—have you had a conversation about racism in any of your classes? Just the idea of racism? Has that ever come up in your classes?

Isaiah: Not really.

SEB: Do you think that schools—do you think that you should have that conversation at school ever?

Isaiah: It should—just to make sure—cuz like it’s in the school and so, instead of acting like it’s not there, they should bring it up and tell people how to deal with it.

At times, students defined racism with clarity. Others offered strong examples including experiences with racial fights, racial slurs, and racial stereotypes. Still, nearly all were reticent to identify racism in their school. Many expressed sentiments similar to Shania when she claimed, “I wouldn’t really say it’s racism anymore cuz we’re like getting late in time, like 2005 now.” In other words, even while the students told many stories of racial harassment and discrimination, they struggled to identify or locate racism. This is an area that requires deeper investigation in future studies.

Patterns

When given the chance to change from interviewee to interviewer, one of the first questions Jordan asked was, “Like these interviews you—you doing. Like do most kids say the same stuff that I said or stuff like that?” In fact, the answer to Jordan’s question is “yes.” There are many places where patterns emerge from the data.

Each participant was asked about his or her plans for the next five years. All replied, “college.” Elijah is the only student who did not mention college specifically,

but when asked about where he saw himself in five years, he responded, “Five years, I see myself still in school trying to get my degrees.” This was the only question on which there was absolute consensus.

A pattern also existed when participants were asked about the best ways to measure what students have learned. Elijah responded that teachers “could just straight up ask—if they ask ‘write down what you learned.’” Jayden responded that the best way for teachers to find out what he learned is to “probably talk—like this right here—speaking and stuff.” For Isaiah, “ask most of the students.” And Shania responded, “Ask questions in the form of like ‘Well, what did you learn?’ and ‘how did this happen?’ and ‘what did this?’ Like ask questions and have written responses. It doesn’t have to be twenty-five questions with you know so many different answers and stuff like that. Like ask five main questions—the things you feel.”

Other patterns emerged when participants were asked about their “favorite room or space.” Some talked of the gym or the cafeteria because it allowed space to be loud and active. However, the most common response was the library. Participants spoke of the library as the best space to access information and social network. It was described as being “quite,” “peaceful,” and “comfortable.”

Conversely, half of the participants stated their “least favorite place” is an assistant principal’s office. Jayden offered some insight as to why this space may have been the most common. According to Jayden, “It’s more—it wasn’t about the office, it was more of me and her conferences, conversations between us. It wasn’t really the office.” It is notable that the cafeteria as well as the library generated multiple responses as both the favorite and least favorite room.

In terms of what students liked most about their school—“friends” was offered by half the respondents. Others talked of teachers, sports, and college preparation. Still, the social networking capacity of schools was most cited. When asked to name

some of the things she liked about her school, Kayla simply and emphatically stated, “my friends.”

Word Counts

Though this is a qualitative project, analyzing the transcripts by simple word counts offered another perspective of the results. In all, twenty word-pattern searches were conducted—including words such as “college,” “fun,” “black,” “white,” “fight,” “respect,” “isolation,” “teach,” “home,” “student,” and more. Each specific word and its variants was searched, recorded, and totaled. For example, word counts conducted for “school” also included “schooling” or “schooled.” In fact, the word “school” and its variations (schooling, schooled) were mentioned by participants over 700 times (a rough average of 70 utterances per interview). Of the 20 word searches, this word was used significantly more frequently than any other word.

Word-pattern analysis was also helpful in understanding my role and evolution as an interviewer. For example, the first two interviewees used the word “respect” 13 times in total. However, the combined total for the last eight interviews spoke the word only 14 times. Whereas early interviewees introduced the word in conversation, I introduced conversation about the word in later interviews.

One of the unexpected results of the word-pattern analysis was the patterning of the words “black” and “white.” The word *white* was used by participants over 100 times. Participants always spoke the word first and accounted for almost 90% of the usage. Participants used the word *black* over 180 times. Participants accounted for 66% of the usage, and I was equally as likely to use *black* first. While the study was about the experience of black students, and participants were given an introduction to the study prior to the interview, I had not anticipated the repeated references to *white* curriculum, *white* teachers, and/or *white* schools.

What do you want school to be like for the next generation?

It seems only fitting to end the results chapter with participant wishes for an educational future. Below are the collated responses to the question “What do you want school to be like for the next generation?”

Kayla: Have them go there and actually learn something . . . And valuing the education—like I said, my friends—we just . . . we don’t . . . we just go to school because we have to. We just sit through 44 minutes of class because we have to. We’re not really eager to learn about new stuff. We kinda just go through the flow and whatever the teacher says goes. So I hope that . . . I don’t know . . . a younger generation can beat the system really. Or just have a better educational system.

Shania: I want it to be a fun—like a fun experience. They have fun now at school but it’s just like it’s not, it’s not how it used to be. So, there’s definitely changes over years. It’s become more serious and stern and mean basically. I—I just want them to—I want it to be fun for them and I want it to be shaped to form so that they have a good experience and get a good education and they have fun. And they have people that they can rely on—I don’t know how we’re gonna do that but [laugh].

Elijah: I honestly want it to be, in a way, in a way, I’d want it to be the way I went through school. But not having to deal with half the stuff that I had to go through. I wouldn’t even want that for my worst enemy. Because, wow. I mean there’s so much with school and everything.

Brianna: I would like school to be a place where they feel they are represented. I want schools to be somewhere where they feel that they can be themselves and that they can enjoy learning. And [pause], I don’t know, that schools actively represent all the people through the world. Not just like, the perspective of old White men [laugh].

Brandon: Better than, uh, I went. I want school to be better . . . Um, like I feel like, you know, students don’t disagree. Like if students have a certain belief, you don’t have to impress it upon everybody. Like if you’re racist, don’t walk around the hall and tell everyone you’re racist. Just keep it to yourself . . . And um, well, I guess education for black students. I think it should be better.

Isaiah: I would like school to be you know more equal to like all—all students and have them get as much, like help, as they needed as possible. And not just have them be excluded from activities or like different things.

Aalilyah: Oh, I would like schools to be smaller. And, you know, I guess I want America [laugh] to look more inclusive of blacks so that they don't have to deal with, you know, those subtle exclusions. That they don't have that experience. Um, I guess within schools, I want teachers to be more sensitive to their specific strengths and um, work with them on their weaknesses but not, um, but I want them to be able to foster independence and learning and strengthening themselves.

Jordan: Basically, ummm, a real good experience. Like, they actually come home and be like they learned suttin. Say that you know that the teachers aren't messin with them. I, I just want it to be a real fun experience for them. You know . . . Well, I mean, it's not going to be that different 'cuz you know, sometimes you have some good days and you have some bad days, so . . . it'll be like—it doesn't matter. I'm much better right now 'cuz people don't, you know, people don't mess with me and stuff like that so I'm feeling real good, so, school's good.

Jada was hoping schools would find ways to prepare students for life in a racially/ethnically diverse society, but most importantly, she would like to see schooling in the future be completely different.

SEB: So, continuing to look ahead to the future. If, and or when, you decide to have children. Or if you have younger family members—cousins, nieces, nephews, things of that sort—what would you like school to be like for them?

Jada: Wow. It would be completely different. [Laugh]

SEB: So, tell me what that means to you—completely different?

Jada: Um, I want it to be [local school] model. I think my elementary school was one of the better schools I was able to go to. I only went there for 5th grade.

SEB: Sure. What did they do that made it so special?

Jada: I think if you learn from an early age that people can play together, you can draw; you can play on the swing set together. That makes it so much easier. I don't think people are innately racist. I think, it's just, if people present you with an option, you're gonna take. And if people tell you, repeatedly, repeatedly, that after you go do this, after you go do that, you know, whatever all the different myths that are out there, then you're going to slowly, "Well, that person does that, so obviously it's true for all." Because that one bad example can sometimes ruin it for people. And so, I just think, yeah, just from an early age go to a really diverse school. Um, lots of options. In terms of middle school, I think the same thing. Just all of diversity and all the same stuff. I think it's really in high school that has—that's the key to ah—ah making changes.

Conclusion

In offering suggestions on how best to report the findings of qualitative research, Patton (1990) writes,

Description is thus balanced by analysis and interpretation. Endless description becomes its own muddle. The purpose of analysis is to organize the description so that it is manageable. Description is balanced by analysis and leads to interpretation. An interesting and readable report provides sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation, and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to understand the description. (p. 430)

Patton adds that the researcher "bears some responsibility" (p. 431) in offering guidance through the "data." This particular offering of the data results challenges Patton's idea. There could have been much more "chatter" and commentary in this results chapter. There are no doubt endless passages that warrant analysis or particular phrases that are in need of parsing. There are an infinite number of interpretations. There are numerous policy recommendations. Additionally, there could have been other foci for the results. Participant references to friends/peers, a theme of struggle/angst, and the racial/economic dynamics of "academic tracks" warrant further investigation.

Another area that warrants further investigation is the differences between responses from young black men and young black women. Male participants were more like to discuss trips to the AP's office and to discuss physical violence. Female participants were more likely to discuss course content and school comfort. This could serve as a starting point for future research. Nonetheless, the results of this qualitative inquiry were intentionally presented in this manner to serve as the background and the context for the next chapter. The goal was to allow students to speak for themselves and for the reader to look deeper into responses. More specific interpretations and conclusions of the data results are addressed in the form of local policy recommendations in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6:

TIMELOOP: BLACK FOLKS AND SCHOOLING IN ITHACA, NY

Introduction of Timeloop

In the fall of 2007, “equity concerns”³⁴ arose in the largest school district in Tompkins County, NY. The fall brought protests at the central administration building, demonstrations at board meetings, and a student-led walkout. There were Human Rights Commission hearings, activist/organizer meetings, and community forums sponsored by the United States Department of Justice. Local, regional, and national media coverage followed, and an Ithaca newspaper editorialized that it was “one of the worst racially charged messes in school district (and area) history.”³⁵

It is important to situate this research within its local historical and racialized context. It was only three years earlier that, unfortunately, a similar period of racial tensions had surfaced. At that time, the human subjects review board expressed legitimate concerns about interviewing black students during a heightened racial climate. Now, just as the project was nearing completion, the return of tensions forced a reevaluation of the project and research findings.

In the project’s original conceptualization, qualitative interviews with black students were designed to explore not only the racialized gaps in educational outcomes but also ways to prevent further racial tensions. The events of 2007 called the design and conclusions into question. My response to the continued racial disparities and the reoccurrence of racial tensions was to critically explore the local history. The result was the creation of a *timeloop* (see Appendix 5 for more information).

³⁴ Topher Sanders’s “Absences spike over IHS safety” (*Ithaca Journal*, 2007, October 19). Throughout the *Journal*’s years of reporting, phases such as *racial tensions* and *interracial clashes* appear to be used interchangeably with *equity concerns*.

³⁵ *Ithaca Journal* editorial, “ICSD Legal Challenge” (2007, October 25).

Timeloop Summary

In making meaning of the *timeloop*, I extrapolate three key ideas. First, and most obviously, education in Ithaca has deep and treasured roots. References to Ithaca as a center of learning reach back over 200 years. It has been celebrated—and celebrates itself—as a global center of learning. Ithaca’s libraries are as vast as its schools. A research university, liberal arts colleges, community college, high schools, Catholic schools, private schools, alternative schools, home schooling, massage schools, vocational schools, Suzuki schools, free schools, republic schools, Montessori schools, and a growing school of hard knocks can all be found in the greater Ithaca community. The community has a storied and diversified tradition of academic excellence, and this helps to explain why for Ithaca—and Ithacans—*education is the industry*.

Second, even within a community of academic excellence, the needs of some students have always been neglected. Since its inception, Ithaca High School has struggled to form a cohesive community. Reports of a fragmented student body begin to emerge before the turn of the century and can be traced at any given time interval. Sevan Terzian’s research and writing on the early years of Ithaca public schools proves instructive here. He writes, “[T]he lesson to be learned from the historical case in Ithaca as well as these current examples is this: if secondary schools are to cultivate thoughtful citizens in a democratic society, policymakers and administrators must devise new ways to solicit regularly the ideas and needs of *all* of their constituents” (Terzian, 2004, p. 50). Concerted efforts to integrate—and sometimes segregate—reflect a local awareness that not all students at IHS received the highest-quality education. As much a tale of academic excellence, the story of education in Ithaca is also one of academic failure.

The third and final theme is the paradox of resistance—more specifically, a “resistance to oppression” and a “resistance to equity.” In the former instance, there is clearly a strong legacy of *resistance to oppression*. This is evidenced in local black folks’ fight to secure their freedom during enslavement in Ithaca. The work/lives of Peter Webb, Daniel Jackson, Peter Wheeler, Harriet Tubman, George A. Johnson, Dr. Corinne Galvin, and many others are notable. Organizations such as St. James AME Zion Church, Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc., and the Southside Community Center were formed—in large part—to resist isolation and segregation. Ithacans formed the Serv-Ur League, the Council for Equality, the Ithaca Black Caucus, and the Village at Ithaca as organizations who actively refused to accept educational failure. By any measure, the *agency* in Ithaca’s black community is impressive, and equally noteworthy are the continued cross-racial and cross-economic alliances. History informs us that Ithacans demonstrate an unwavering audacity to fight for a qualitatively better community.

Simultaneously, however, there is a legacy of *resistance to equity*. In other words, Ithaca’s history includes a governmental decree denouncing the Fugitive Slave Law as well as a Ku Klux Klan “parade” through the heart of the city. Racial fights, specious legal codes, and overt discrimination in employment/housing are interwoven within Ithaca’s history. As Claudia Montague writes, “Although Ithaca has cherished a reputation for racial tolerance that predates the Civil War, the experiences of its black community did not differ greatly from those of blacks almost anywhere in the nation” (Sisler, Hobbie, & Dieckmann, 1988, p. 103).

Similar to national models, Ithaca has also constructed a school system and community culture that actively works to maintain racial and economic power hierarchies. Attempts to formulate policies that would promote equity have met frequent—and at times fervent—resistance. Programs, resources, and offices designed

to promote equity have been systematically eviscerated. Claims of budgetary and/or political constraints are found throughout the local history. Despite—or rather alongside—the many platitudes placed upon Ithaca, *resistance to equity* is a formative part of Ithaca’s character. Each of these can be found throughout the timeloop appendix and the remainder of this chapter.

Timeloop as Spoken Word

What follows below is a transcript of the *Achieving Equity: Where Have We Been?* talk delivered at the History Center (Ithaca, NY) on March 27, 2008. In response to events during the fall of 2007 and as part of this dissertation research, I assisted in the creation and facilitation of a three-part community series focused on educational equity in Ithaca schools.³⁶ The goal was to actively engage the community in working toward a solution to eliminate racial disparities—and optimistically to find ways to interrupt future episodes of tension. As Afrocentric research methods instruct, this was an opportunity to make research relevant and useful in the community. The transcribed talk is my spoken version of the *timeloop*. It does not include citations or references. However, all bibliographic information, including detailed endnotes, can be found in the version placed in Appendix 5.

The first event of the series included a talk on the historical unfoldings of black students in Ithaca schools. The second event, *Where are We Now?*, used video to communicate the current status of educational equity. The third and last event, *Where Can We Go?*, asked the community to utilize their understandings of the first two

³⁶ For more information, see the *Ithaca Journal*’s coverage beginning with guest column by Derfel, B., & Eversley-Bradwell, S. (March 24, 2008). *Achieving equity: Where can we go?* The remaining *Ithaca Journal* articles covering the series are offered in chronological order: Staff. (March 29, 2008). *Ithaca has history of equity issues*; Staff. (April 12, 2008). *Community Foundation grant helps equity series*; and Sanders, T. (April 26, 2008). *Public discusses ways to improve equity*.

events as a starting point to forge a path forward. In other words, and if there is agreement that *Achieving Equity* is the goal, where can (and should) we go?

This transcribed lecture serves as an artifact and archive, simultaneously. Moreover, the hesitations, the repetitions, the pauses, and the audience reactions represent the mechanics of oral rendition: of storytelling. The narrative is included in this format to exemplify the use of orality (nommo) as well to situate the interviews and experiences of black students. Most importantly, this telling of black folks and schooling in Ithaca, NY, provides the necessary sociohistoric context for the policy recommendations and conclusions found in Chapter 7.

Achieving Equity: Where Have We Been? (2008, March 27, The History Center, Ithaca, NY)³⁷

[Introduction by Gary Reinbolt—Executive Director of the History Center.]

I'm pleased with the turnout. Thanks for coming. About three or four years ago—board members here will correct me if I'm wrong—the History Center reevaluated its mission, reevaluated the direction it wanted to go. And one of the things that it wanted to do was to engage in dialogues with the public where we could apply the lessons of history to help make decisions about current events. This is a wonderful example of that desire. This is the first of a three-part series. Sean Eversley Bradwell of Ithaca College is going to present this evening on the historical context. In two weeks on April 10th Barry Derfel will be presenting the point of view of the families and students who are involved in this. And on April 24th we're hoping to have all of you back for a session when you will be the stars. So we are certainly appreciative of the fact that you showed up tonight, and since you didn't come to hear me, I'm going to now turn it over to Sean Eversley Bradwell.

³⁷ Special thanks to Professor Sofia Villenas and Alana Butler for their recording and transcription of the talk.

[Applause]

[Talk by Sean Eversley Bradwell—Ph.D. Candidate, Cornell University.]

Thank you as well for attending. This is fantastic. I should begin by thanking a couple of our cosponsors. This is sort of the brainchild of a couple of folks. Barry Derfel, out of the Office of Staff Development of the Ithaca School District; my director, Asma Barlas, out of the Center for Culture, Race, and Ethnicity. Mary White got in contact with Gary Reinbolt and Paul Miller, who have been working for probably about two months now, trying to put this together. So we are greatly appreciative for you all being here, and I'll try and make this talk as interactive as possible, but we'll see what's going to be taking place. I'm going to talk *at* you for a few minutes, and then we'll proceed from there.

I want to begin with a couple of disclaimers in interpretations. What I'm about to say this evening is in part based upon my research, a large part of it is my dissertation research, part which is personal research. And so I'm speaking as an individual and not on behalf of any organization . . . And clarifications. This talk begins within a theoretical framework of what some folks call "critical race theory." And critical race theory has a number of components to it, one of which is the art or the idea or the importance of story telling. And story telling is a really large part of what we do. A student of mine recommended I read a book called *God in the Machine*, by Ann Foerst. And Ann Foerst is a theologian who is studying at MIT, who is working at MIT, as part of the artificial intelligence movement. It's not something that I would normally read, but since it was recommended, I read it.

Ann Foerst is basically trying to say that if we want to talk about artificial intelligence we have to understand what makes folks human. And to understand what humanity means will help us begin to understand what artificial intelligence means.

[Foerst] has this quote, which was very telling for me: “Humans have a need to tell stories, to make sense of the world. These stories help define us, help us discover who we are, to create community. Storytelling is not without its own problems. But it is our primary feature. The main vendor for interaction, and what we do best.” And her argument is that what separates us from other mammals and other animals is our ability and our desire to tell stories.

And so part of what’s going to happen today is I’m going to tell you a story. I’m going to tell you a story of the history of black students, the history of education in Ithaca primarily focused on black students from 1807 onward, if that makes sense. And we’ll try to do it with a couple of photos and some other things as well.

Part of this also begins with a story fit to tell. I’ve been doing research on Ithaca schools since I arrived in the Ithaca City School District in 1996–97, with my first year serving as the assistant principal for minority student affairs. And at that time I was charged with helping black, brown, and Asian students navigate the educational system at the Alternative Community School. It forced me to look at the educational system from a different perspective, both being a classroom teacher but also trying to be a support person. And so as I was going through trying to read some local histories, I kept getting hit with just quick blurbs. And these are all taken out of context, there’s no question about it. I’ll make a quick disclaimer. I am greatly indebted to the work of Carol Kammen and Jane Deickmann, two of our local historians, who have done incredible work, and without their work my perspective on the local history would not exist.

But a couple of these quotes go as such: “The Southside does not really come to mind with phrases like ‘historical significance’ or ‘architecturally important interest’”; “finding information about blacks in the earliest days of Tompkins County is not easy, since material about them was not collected into area archives”; and “the

rich cultural life that black inhabitants created for themselves apart from the white community, and apart, for the most part unremarked by them.”

I kept seeing phrases like this, that there aren’t stories about black folks in the archives, that their stories at all times are unremarked by the greater white population, that it’s not of historical significance. And those are the kind of things that really sparked my quest to dig a little deeper, in many respects. And again, some of these are taken out of context.

I highly recommend folks go take a look at what’s there. And you will see at the bottom of each slide, at the bottom of most slides, there will be a citation. The complete citation list is up on the History Center website. But if folks are interested in the kind of things that I was reading and looking at to create this timeloop, it is there for you. At some point in time, the timeloop itself will be up there, which is roughly about 35 pages [see Appendix 5].

How much of the history of education in Ithaca is parallel to the national history of education of black students? All right, so where are these points of interest? And, more importantly, where do they connect? Another thing that’s going to happen this evening is I’m going to show you a number of photos from the History Center archives. Donna [Eschenbrenner] has been fantastic in helping me collect some of these photos, along with a couple of student interns. I’ve been using the archives here at the History Center, I’ve been using the archives of the Ithaca school district, I’ve used Cornell’s archives as well. And I highly recommend those folks who are interested to go and explore what’s there. But as I’m looking through these pictures I am struck by pictures like this [picture displayed . . . murmurs from audience] We’re there. Or this [another picture]. Or this [another picture]. Or this [another picture]. We could keep going, right? You’re getting the point. There are black folks. Black folks have been here since almost Ithaca’s conception. And while it may not be the

dominant ethnic group, we are here, we're present. I'm curious about these stories. I want to know about Wilhelmina Johnson. Right? 1927, 7th grade. I want to know about her family, I want to know about her experience. I want to trace that linear history to see—or nonlinear history—to see if there are ways in which *her* experience tells us anything about what's taking place today. And so when I'm looking at these photos I'm trying to find ways in which these educational experiences are instructive. Because we seem to be in a cyclical nature of racial tensions, racial violence, whatever word or phrase you want to put to it. So I'm curious about these stories. I'm curious about these experiences and what they tell us, what takes place. I decided to go ahead and construct what I will call a *timeloop*, sometimes called a timeline. Timelines don't work for me. I don't believe in linear notions of history. There are plenty of times when history literally folds back on itself, and I'm curious to explore what those look like. So, here we go.

I should back up for a second. Most of the photos that I use are all photos from the History Center, with the exception of three or four, which are ones that I have taken personally. I was talking to Barry Derfel, and I purposely did not use any videos. I tend to like videos. I'm a visual learner and videos work for me. I work with college populations which don't want to hear me speak, but would prefer to see something on the television. So I use videos to my advantage. But for this talk I decided to avoid videos, because I think sometimes pictures, still images, tell us much more. In showing these pictures, I'm going to try and pause for a little bit to give people time to digest what they're seeing. And then, towards the end, or at the end of the talk, without question we'll open up to dialogues and folks can ask all kinds of questions of what we're seeing.

For me, this timeloop of black students in Ithaca begins with Sullivan's campaign. I'm always mindful not to begin histories with the arrival of European

folks. Right? The Cayuga nation has been here for hundreds of years that predates Europeans—in this case, European genocide. But, with that being said, for the interest of time, this is a quote from Harry Melone, who says, “With the sword and the flame, the land was cleared of its former owners.” And he’s talking about Cayuga Lake in general, but that also includes what takes place in Ithaca. Some folks may know that there is the history marker that’s down on Route 13 right across from Buttermilk Falls.

We have the understanding that when we begin to talk about Ithaca we must acknowledge the fundamental act, that this history begins with the genocide of indigenous folks. There’s no way to escape that. It’s not polite conversation. We don’t want to talk about it frequently. But it’s a historical fact, we have to begin there. And so I’m also mindful of what Albert Memmi says, “History wears a military uniform.” Quite a bit of what takes place in Ithaca is the Military Tract Act that takes place after the American independence. Old military veterans were given tracts of land in Ithaca. That’s part of what brought them, the spoils of war, right?

One of those folks that came here brought with him lots of goods and services, and as Field Horne says, “Many early settlers brought human chattel in addition to moveable goods in Ithaca.” In 1787, Richard Loomis travels with Robert McDowell. Robert McDowell owns Richard Loomis, which means the first black person in Tompkins County was enslaved. Again, not polite history. We don’t like talking about it. But we can’t escape that fact. We’re talking about enslavement with the arrival of black folks in Ithaca, in Tompkins County.

After reading these histories I kept pulling up quotes that spoke to me. So there’s no doubt these quotes are chosen intentionally, right? There’s an overt, obvious political bias. There’s no way to escape that. It doesn’t change the fact of the words, what they say, but you should know that obviously I’m trying to tell a story, so this is my story to be challenged, the merits of the story, how it’s constructed, later on.

Robert McDowell's also responsible, if you listen to people like Morris Kurtz, Robert McDowell also helps to begin to create the first school, in 1807. He's responsible for enslavement *and* education. It's a funny parallel. Oppression *and* liberation in many respects. Here's a postcard, undated at this point in time, to give us a sense that education here has been around the place for some time.

When Philip Stansbury takes his 2,000-mile trek from northeast Canada down through New Jersey, he is quite taken with Ithaca. He's walking on foot. And he writes, "Ithaca will be the place, wherein all those minor academies and institutions, at present spread over the fertile and well inhabited countries beyond the first of the parallel lakes to Erie, will be centered into one great flourishing temple of science." He writes this in 1822, predating Cornell by 40 years, right? Forty-three years. Ithaca is already on its way to being an educational epicenter. It's already being talked about as trying to forge a college. [Ithacans] put the application in with another institution, with John Hobart. Hobart gets it, Ithaca doesn't. And actually what they tell Ithaca is, look, if you can raise \$5,000, we will give you a college. Now, \$5,000 in 1822 is a pretty large sum of money. It's basically New York State saying to Ithaca, you don't deserve a college because you can't afford it.

Still, what takes place is they use that seed money to open up a different institution, to open up the Ithaca Academy. The Ithaca Academy opens up in 1823, coming from all the efforts of trying to form a college. Now that's pretty remarkable, because compulsory education for New York State doesn't begin until 1875. That law was passed in 1875, so Ithaca predates compulsory education by 50 years. And not elementary education, secondary education. Elementary schools had been around for quite some time, 1807 . . . to have a secondary school at this point in time is pretty impressive.

But we're going to backtrack, because slavery is a large portion of Ithaca's history. Peter Wheeler has what's considered to be one of the very few slave narratives of the Northeast. Right? He wrote a book with a very long title: *Chains and Freedom: Or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler, a Colored Man Yet Living. A Slave in Chains, a Sailor on the Deep, and a Sinner at the Cross*. This is a book that he in essence dictates to Mr. Lester in 1839. Peter Wheeler's in Ithaca from 1800 to 1809. In fact, his case has been written about again by people like Carol Kammen, because his treatment was so harsh that local white citizens took [his owner] to court. Folks tried to have him jailed for his treatment of Peter Wheeler. Peter runs away at age 17. He just takes off and never came back to Ithaca again. But it's a remarkable piece, and that's because it's one of the very few historical documents we have about the slave life in the North. We tend to think of slavery as being primarily a Southern phenomenon, which is a gross misconception. It was as rampant in the North as it has been any place else. In fact, the book I'm reading now, by Lloyd Stewart, is called *A Far Cry from Freedom*, basically talking about the gradual emancipation, and in New York particularly it was especially problematic.

We have other stories of slavery as well. Here we have Frederick Webb. Frederick Webb is the son of Peter Webb. Peter Webb was one of the folks that created this institution, the St. James AME Zion Church in 1833. Frederick Webb's father, Peter, who escaped slavery from Virginia, came up in 1810 as part of the burgeoning Underground Railroad. Historians are clear to make a point that Ithaca was not a major part of the Underground Railroad, but was without question a stop, and there are still questions about finding Underground Railroad conductors, houses—stairwells, basements, tunnels, things of that sort. We find a couple scattered throughout the Ithaca community. There's no doubt that AME Zion Church was the epicenter of the Underground Railroad in Ithaca.

It also was the epicenter of the black community, in most respects. If you think about the ways black communities exist throughout the country, the church was the grounding, the church was the founding, right? Everything started with the church, and it spread around there. So there's a reason why, to this day, Southside is associated with black folks. There's a reason why that exists. The church was built in Southside. One, it was the poorest land in Ithaca. We'll talk about later how the land would flood frequently, until Mr. Titus decided he wanted to change the creek and put up these steel barriers. But before that it was not the best land in Ithaca. So black folks were almost mandated to live there. They built the church there as the beginning of their community. And throughout the years we see this community staying relatively intact.

Here is a picture of Calvary Baptist Church. And I think the date here is 1897. Calvary Baptist Church begins in 1857, and it's a splinter group from AME Zion Church, trying to practice their faith slightly differently. And so they move to Albany Street. But this picture always speaks to me. I think it's a pretty profound picture in that regard.

So, let's continue on our journey. Ezra Cornell said this: "I will found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study," and many of us know that just last year it was voted the best college motto in the country. Ithaca has been praised for that. And this motto has been both revered by Cornellians, as well as hated by those folks who are not treated as such. Even while Cornell is one of the first institutions in the Northeast to admit women into the college, it also has a history and a pattern of discrimination that cannot be ignored as well. So, continue on. Ezra Cornell—excuse me, A. D. White writes a letter to C. H. McCormick, and he states in 1874: "In answer to your letter first received, I would say that we have no colored students at the university at present, but shall be very glad to receive any who are prepared to enter. Although there is no certainty of the entrance of any such student

here during the present year that may come even if one offered himself and passed examinations, we should receive him, even if all 500 White students were to ask for dismissal on that account.” That’s a pretty bold assertion for the college president to say. Right? At a time when black folks weren’t allowed in institutions. Moreover, we can find there was a good deal of racial prejudice that took place in 1910s–1920s, where black folks weren’t allowed to live in dorms for a long period of time. This is partly the reason why Alpha Phi Alpha begins in the community, because [black students] weren’t allowed to stay on campus. Anyway, we’ll talk about that momentarily. But that’s a pretty bold assertion to make in 1874. It took a number of years for this to be actualized, but it’s a bold assertion.

Here is a headstone of Daniel Jackson. Daniel Jackson was a man who purchased his freedom from slavery in Ithaca, and then went on to work for a gentleman by the name of E. S. Esty. At the age of 75, he had been so forlorn that he could not spend his years with his mother that he tried to save enough money to go back to Virginia to bring her up here. He couldn’t raise the money. E. S. Esty, in essence, donates \$50 to the cause. Daniel Jackson goes down to Virginia, brings his mother up here, they spend a glorious five days together, and Daniel passes away. [audience murmuring, “Oh no . . .”] But even in death Daniel says something about life in Ithaca in Tompkins County. Folks who want to go to the Ithaca cemetery, you can see this headstone, right at the base of Cornell University. There it is. Jackson’s headstone reads, “Faithful Daniel Jackson (1814–1889) BORN A SLAVE. He followed The North Star to Freedom. He returned to bring his aged mother and tenderly cared for her as long as he lived, they were not long parted for she survived him but five years Daniel was 75 and his mother 103 yrs. of age. This Tribute belongs of right to Faithfulness and filial affection.” And this is part of our history, and it’s part of what took place in this community.

Speaking of E. S. Esty, he is the first president of the Board of Education. He has a *profound* impact on education. Here is a gentleman who is, in essence, showing his benevolence to black folks, even while he's trying to expand education options to various people throughout Tompkins County. A picture of the first Board of Education. E. S. Esty is right there, along with some other folks. We'll talk about E. S. Esty in a moment.

The *Ithaca Democrat* was not as pleased as other folks in the community about the advent of public education. For those folks who are educational historians, they know that public education was not easily come by. There were all kinds of severe battles. In fact, people protested the idea of public taxation for public education: You're going to tax me to educate somebody else's child? There was active resistance. In *Kalamazoo versus Michigan* in 1874, the Supreme Court says it's constitutional to tax for community good. It's constitutional to tax for public schools. It's not happenstance that, as the Constitution, or the Supreme Court, acknowledges this reality, Ithaca begins its quest for public education.

The Ithaca Academy goes from 1823 to 1874. Right? According to the quote—this is from the *Ithaca Democrat*—“The Ithaca Academy is now a thing of the past, and in its place we are to have a higher school with no better literary advantages, but an increased taxation to support it. They will call it the gratified son of the ‘friends of education in Ithaca,’ who hunger for public participation under it, or in it?” Small tongue-in-cheek humor there, for those folks who can speak 1875 language. And then, one of my favorite quotes of all times. If you go through and look at the *Journal* microfiche, you find the very first day of school, public school [crowd laughs, drowns out speaker] . . . “The public schools opened today and the children are all happy.” Now, the funny thing is, that's the only reference to education that day. There's

nothing else in the five pages of the *Ithaca Journal*. Not a single literary reference beyond this quote. I always wonder who they were talking to . . .

E. S. Esty is the Board president from 1874 to 1890. Sixteen years. That's a pretty long tenure for most folks. Not as long as F. D. Boynton, but a pretty long tenure. And he has a pretty profound impact on the formation of the Board of Education, how we think about it, and who has access to it. This is a picture of the Ithaca Academy, the old Ithaca Academy building, which is on the historic education block in Ithaca, the corner of Seneca and Cayuga. [The corner] has housed a school for over 200 years. There's always been some sort of educational institution. This is a photo of those folks who were at the Ithaca Academy in 1879.

1879 is a pretty important year for a couple of reasons. One, E. S. Esty gives the commencement speech. And at the commencement speech he states, "Do not receive these diplomas merely as certificates of requirements and success already achieved. But rather regard them as the keys which shall unlock for you the doors of colleges and universities. Regard these as but the stepping-stones by means by which you may go up higher. 'Always room at the top,' said Daniel Webster. Although the lower and middle ranks jostle each other in competition, and struggle for position and support, how serenely the comparative few who attain eminence stand both in life and history." We should bear in mind that, for the most part, without exception, Ithaca High School, both public and the [private] Academy, exists solely to get folks from the Little Red to the Big Red. You find throughout its history that people are talking about the way in which Ithaca High School was primarily geared to get folks to go to Cornell University. Not "university." Cornell University. It was very specific about that goal, and about that intent.

In the audience that day was this gentleman. We're pretty much assured that he was in the audience that day. This is George A. Johnson, one of the famed conductors

of Ithaca's Underground Railroad. A barber. Because if you're running away from slavery you need a haircut. And you find this in communities all over the place. Barbers were one of the central folks that helped support the Underground Railroad, right? They cleaned folks up. They helped get folks connected in the communities. Probably why when we had our own barbershop fiasco here in Ithaca a couple of years ago, it made such a rancor in the black community. The barbershop has historically been *the* social place. It's *the* place to get information. It's *the* place to go and connect and get fellowship. This has always been the case.

George A. Johnson's role, not only as a barber, but as a conductor is of the utmost import. He also had a daughter, Jessie A. Johnson. And Jessie A. Johnson is an 1879 graduate of Ithaca High School. She is, from all research that we can find, the first black graduate of Ithaca High School. And so it's interesting to me that, though black folks begin their time in Ithaca as enslaved folks, they begin their time in Ithaca education and Ithaca schools as fights for freedom. Her father was *intimately* involved in liberation movements. That was his primary objective. And the barbershop was the front. Everything else was sort of secondary. The father of the very first black graduate from Ithaca High School was a conductor of the Underground Railroad? That's impressive. To me anyway, as a social historian, that's very impressive. I like George A. Johnson. I take a run on his bridge when I run, which is not every day. Some folks may know the South Plain Street Bridge was recently renamed the George Johnson Bridge, and so he's actively part of our collective memory, as we speak.

E. S. Esty would later say, "I have watched, not without interest, the conflict going on in many districts between Catholic and anti-Catholic elements, and I've failed to congratulate both classes in our community that good sense shown by both sides has so far saved us from the harm of our schools from such dissensions." Now, he says this in 1883. The funny thing is that Immaculate Conception begins in 1884.

He may not have been as profound as he thought he was. Again, it's important to report, to note, that E. S. Esty also challenges the role of women on boards of education. And he's in disagreement that women should serve, that it's not their place. So here's someone helping to fight African-American enslavement, but at the same point in time showing his patriarchy, at the same point in time showing his misogyny.

But beyond E. S. Esty, the person who probably has the most impact on Ithaca schools is Frank Boynton. Boynton is a former principal of Ithaca High School and superintendent of Ithaca schools from 1900—to get this—1930. There's a reason why there's a middle school named after him. He was a *national* figure. I was telling someone the other day that the more I'm researching Ithaca history, as a pedagogical historian, as an educational theorist, I was amazed. I was trying to find where Ithaca fits into the national framework. Right? The more I researched, the more I realized that Ithaca *drove* the national framework. There's something unique about this community which I've yet to be able to get my hand on. [crowd laughs]

Ithaca has done some pretty remarkable things. And Frank Boynton was a part of that in many respects. He writes a couple of articles in the *High School Review*, which was not *a* journal, but was *the* journal for high school education at the time. It began at Cornell University and quickly moved to the University of Chicago. But while—or during his time here, Boynton is active not only in State education circles—he's a frequent discussor for the New York Board of Regents—but also on a national level. And he says—if I can find my papers here—“That high schools do not reach the masses as they should and as they can and must, will be generally admitted. To suppose that they are not alive to this condition, or that they are not making strenuous effort to widen the scope of their influence, would be at once to make a grave error and do them serious injustice . . . The American high school was not designed, like its predecessor, the old academy, for a college preparatory school. Its chief and ultimate

aim is the preparation of young men and women for American citizenship. The curricula of tax-supported schools must be elastic enough to respond to the pulse of reasonable popular demand.”

So here is Frank Boynton saying, right, that we’re not like the old Academy. Our curriculum has to be much more expansive and flexible, to be able to reach a wider demographic than what the old Academy was trying to achieve. How can you get more and more students to come to school? Remember at this point in time Ithaca is primarily an agrarian society, like most communities. This is our town in 1902. We had a weak attempt at the Industrial Revolution in Ithaca, right? Ithaca Clock Works, Ithaca Gun. I constantly tell my students that transportation makes that near impossible. Any direction you go in Ithaca—it’s up. Moving goods and services around proves to be difficult. We decide relatively early on that, you know, what we can make our fortune in is education. Right? We can be an educational epicenter.

At this point in time, 1902, if you go through and start looking at the yearbooks, the Ithaca High School yearbooks, you start seeing something very unique. One, old yearbooks listed addresses, which, with various laws now that would probably be illegal, right? We know with the privacy acts we could not make that take place. But, listing addresses and we see: Cayuga Heights, Albany. And you see things like Rochester, or Syracuse. Baltimore. Washington DC. England. China. Folks are coming from all over the place, not to attend Cornell University. To attend Ithaca High School, with the hopes of spring boarding to Cornell University.

The high school becomes one of the drawing points of this community. The public high school becomes one of the drawing points of this community, where folks will travel from far and wide to attend this institution with the hopes of being able to parlay that into admission into Cornell University. That part of Ithaca’s history is fascinating. And so we’ll talk in a little bit about the work of Sevan Terzian, who

writes a bit about reading Ithaca High School newspapers, like the *Tattler*, as an untapped resource of historical information. I feel the same thing about yearbooks. You just sort of thumb through the yearbooks and read the class orations, look at the pictures, see where folks are coming from. It tells us something very spectacular about what is taking place at that point in time, that very few communities would have people willing to travel thousands of miles to get a high school diploma. But Ithaca has that.

Even while Frank Boynton is saying, “Look, we’re not building an Academy,” like, “that’s not us; we’re not about college preparatory schools, that’s not what we do,” history belies it. The 1906 yearbook. “Ithaca High School, Cornell’s largest fitting school.” Advertisements taken out by whom? Frank D. Boynton’s office. Ithaca High School starts selling itself, statewide and nationally, as *Cornell’s largest fitting school*: Come here. We can get more folks into Cornell than any other place in the state. We’re the spot you want to be at. We’re it. Come. Right? [The yearbooks] start listing numbers, talks about scholarships. Talks about the way in which Ithaca High School has a remarkable curriculum with fantastic teachers that will in essence almost guarantee you admission to Cornell University. Again, we’re not talking about the old Academy, and what that purpose was, and whether or not the public school was trying to be something different. Ithaca’s own high school yearbook states something to the contrary.

Here’s a picture of Ithaca High School before the Dewitt Building was put up. This is a picture that we think was taken around the turn of the century, just after the turn of the century about 1903, 1904. And this is again right down on the corner of Cayuga and Tioga [*sic*]. So this picture always speaks to me just given the way it looks, but I also like this picture, for some reason. They’re almost from the same angle, but [the photos] elicit a different emotional response from me, I don’t know

about other folks. If we go back . . . [some kind of distracting interruption] . . . Ithaca High School burns down. February 12th, 1912. Ithaca High School burns down. There's a need of a new school.

This is a picture of Sigma Lambda Nu, the Mu chapter. One other thing you might not realize is that the high school for its first 30 years or so had fraternities and sororities. If you go through the yearbook you will find sororities and fraternities there. Some of them at times were supported by a district sponsor, and then relatively early on there were no longer district sponsors. Again, to reference the work of Sevan Terzian. Frank Boynton in particular started realizing that the sororities and fraternities were actually creating a divisive student body. Right? It was fostering cliques. Fostering social groups. And so they did away with them. They did away with them in 1911, before the beginning of the school year. And so the Board, at this point in time, right, they expected foul play. Some folks think there may have been a fraternity prank gone awry that burned the building down.

So what else is going on? We start devising what we know now today as the Dewitt Building. We propose this building to be built in 1912. And we see on top, this is included in this proposal, in this brochure, that "Ithaca is known around the world as an educational center." 1912 that statement is made. Ithaca is known around the world as an educational center. We've already arrived. Folks are already recruited from far and wide to come to Ithaca, because that's what we do. We do education, and we do it well.

Again, there was a big debate about whether or not tax dollars should help to fund this process. And we decided, of course, that tax dollars should fund this process. We could have moved here. We chose not to. This is Percy Fields. Percy Fields was owned by the old Ithaca Academy, and Percy Fields is the location of Boynton Middle School today, right? And so there was a debate about whether we should move down

there. And they said, no, that the swampiness did not make for a good high school. [audience laughs] They kept it as a baseball field, that they had to cancel games because there was too much water on the field so they couldn't play.

Oh, this is a quote from 1923. Ithaca had a black newspaper that existed in 1923. Only put out three editions, but it was here. It was called the *Monitor*. And in 1923 there was an editorial that says, "We wish more of our young people were graduating this year, and hope that these young ladies will continue to study and make a mark for themselves and for the race, as there's plenty of room for such material, and the race needs you."

In 1923, three young black women graduated from Ithaca High School. The paper writes about this as a celebratory event. Look what we're doing. We're graduating from high school. Come celebrate these young ladies. Come be a part of this communal celebration. You can see this constant celebration of education in the *Ithaca Monitor*, demonstrating in essence that black folks had a pretty strong respect for education, that they viewed it in very high regard. And I couldn't resist—this is one of my all-time favorite quotes, which this is in the April 1923 edition of the *Monitor*: "The one good job for our nation's leaders is to take the money out of war and put it into students. Quit betting on gunpowder, and bet on the kids." [laughter and applause from audience] I didn't say it, but thanks for your applause. [laughter]

We go from 1923, where we have this sort of talk about gunpowder, to one of, I think, Ithaca's most reviled events. Some folks probably don't know, but the Klan marched down Main Street in 1925. And they marched 500 strong, according to what the *Journal* said. With thousands lining the streets to watch, right? Thousands lining the streets to watch. But that's not the part that disturbs me. I'm not really too concerned about the Klan. The part that disturbs me is what's talked about in this quote. This is from the *Ithaca Journal*: "Ku Klux Klansmen and Klanswomen

estimated at nearly 500 in number, marched through the city streets Saturday afternoon in a spectacular parade, witnessed from the curb by thousands . . . A float accompanied the parade, on which were Klan children ostensibly listening to a religious teacher as she pored over a large volume of the Holy Bible before her . . . Banners proclaimed contingents from Seneca and Chemung counties, and one designated a group of Tompkins County women.”

We have this sort of indoctrination, this acculturation of young folks participating in this parade. And so we go by pictures like this. And this. [The parade] was a relatively large event. This event has a pretty profound impact on the black community. Go figure, right? They start realizing that political mobilization needs to happen. And they start mobilizing politically. It begins with the precursor to the Serv-Us League.

The Serv-Us League is also the precursor to the creation of the Southside Community Center. But after this event, black folks begin to realize they need to have some place where they can coalesce with one another and at least articulate some sort of ideas about what this community should look like, and how we should respond when these sort of things happen. I entered a blank slide in this presentation, because I have no smooth transition from one to another. How do I go from the Klan march to something good? And how did it happen that way?

I put a blank slide in to let us refocus ourselves and talk about the events in 1935, where Ithaca had a pretty major flood that took place. A couple folks lost their lives, and severe property damage. It looked something like this. This is almost the same location as the last picture we saw. This is Fair Street, which is right down by the park, the skate park. And again, it’s only a couple of blocks from my house. I’m always amazed when I come across these pictures that are within three blocks from where I live. From Ithaca Fairgrounds, and then of course young folks. This is all

about children, young adults. The flood of 1935 also had a profound effect on the black community.

Remember, the Southside neighborhood was the land that was deemed the least desired. Which meant it was open to flooding. It was the most impacted, beyond Trumansburg. I didn't put any Trumansburg pictures. If folks are interested, we can talk to the Ithaca Center. Downtown Trumansburg was pretty much destroyed. It overflowed the bridge on Main Street, and took out a number of buildings. Still, the Southside community was especially impacted by [the flood]. It began to expose, not unlike the Katrina flood of 2005, a pretty severe racial gap. Some had access to help, to emergency funds, and other folks didn't. And coming after the march, the Klan march of 1925, on top of the flood of 1935, black Ithacans decide that they must have a community center that responds to their needs. And so, what we get is the Southside Community Center in 1938, which we know was dedicated by the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt.

Eleanor Roosevelt states, "I dedicate this building to the service of the people of the community. I am glad the two races are working together." And I think that may have been her optimism, or in the way that people have of better understanding. "Here in this building you will find a happier, healthier, better future for your children, and therefore a happier and better community." And so Eleanor is at the dedication ceremony. [question from audience member]

The Southside Community Center becomes, beyond AME Zion church and Calvary, becomes the focal point of the black community. It's the social gathering spot where most things take place. There is the Levi Spaulding Library. [Spaulding] was the first black peace officer in Ithaca who died while on duty from a heart attack. There's the Levi Spaulding Library that was at Southside at one point in time. Dr. James L. Gibbs and other folks had orchestrated to have dental services for young

folks—free of charge. It became a place where people would begin to find themselves gathering and participating. It became not only a civic organization but, much more importantly, an educational organization and a political organization. Political activism, for the most part, began . . . not began . . . takes place in the Southside Community Center, beginning roughly 1938 onward.

I'm now going to share one of my all-time favorite quotes. There's a number of masters' theses and dissertations on Ithaca. It's amazing how many folks have written books on this community. Amazing how many articles there are in periodicals and journals. But there's also 15 to 20 masters' theses and dissertations that you can find in Cornell's reserves. This is Emma Rose Elliot's. E. R. Elliot wrote this in 1944, and it may offer some insights on what's taking place today: "For a city of its size and location, Ithaca has a relatively large Negro population. Doubtlessly, this fact is related to the presence of the university. Negroes can find employment here as cooks, kitchen workers, and housekeepers in dormitories, fraternity and sorority houses, and private homes. One of the Community Centers, of which Ithaca has three, is maintained for the negro group. And the activities of their young people center around the 'South Side House' to a large extent. By the time local negro children have reached high school age, they have developed a definite group feeling. They are apt not only to overtly resent any implications of inferiority, but also to read slight into situations when none was intended. Thus, Ithaca teachers frequently find it even unwise to encourage white and colored groups to mingle in classroom situations. There is always the danger that a negro child will resent some unwitting act or comment of a white child, and the negro group make physical retaliation later."

In 1944 we already realize that in the high school there is the possibility of racial violence. I would have a different interpretation than Emma Rose would, but I understand the fact that she has highlighted something that's important for me in terms

of the research that I do. That we already begin to see some sort of dissention taking place. And the fact that teachers find it unwise to encourage interaction within groups further exacerbates divisions. Further exacerbates the fact that we have, as some folks have claimed, two if not three different high schools. We see this early on.

Now I'm going to play for you an audio clip by John Hope Franklin. This is one of the two audio clips I'm going to play. John Hope Franklin came to Ithaca in 1953. He was at Cornell. I'll let John Hope tell you his own business:

June 18, 1953 was a remarkably beautiful day. The sun was shining bright. We got up in the morning in Madison, Wisconsin, where my mother-in-law had come up to accompany us to our next venue, which was Ithaca, New York. And she came to take care of our 10-month-old son and to assist us in the trip. We would begin our leisurely, carefree journey from Madison, Wisconsin, where I'd been teaching for one semester, to Ithaca, New York, where I was to teach in the summer session at Cornell. And this was a part of what I call the charade of the so-called universities inviting me for a stint in their academic year, either a semester or a summer session, knowing full well that there was no intent and no interest in retaining me for more than that stated period. And I went along with the charade because I thought it was a lot of fun to witness these hypocrites who expressed such great admiration for my scholarship, who after a stint sent me on my way. And I learned a great deal, and I use every experience as a learning experience anyway. So I found out a lot about higher education in the United States, as I moved from Harvard—where I taught summer school and they had the temerity to ask me to return. I said, "I've done it once. That's enough. I'll move on to some other place," And so I went on.

John Hope Franklin indicates something that is a relatively common experience in Ithaca, the transience of Ithaca, right? It's a very transient population. In fact, one of the instigators of this talk is I think that we have a lack of communal and/or community memory. My work with students, particularly around issues of equity in the city schools, seems to lack a historical understanding, as if folks haven't been trying to do this [work] for quite some time. It forced me to sort of go back and dig. But John Hope Franklin also indicates that there have been some of the most eminent black scholars who have had *stints* in Ithaca, frequently with children in tow, which means their children also have had *stints* in Ithaca schools. It makes me think of

people like Henry Louis Gates, who was here, Manning Marable. We could go down the list of a number of black intelligentsia who have come to Ithaca with children.

John Hope Franklin goes on to tell the story. As he was going from Madison to Ithaca he decided they were going to take a leisurely drive. And part of the story that he tells is that in this leisurely drive they could not find a hotel. No colored folks allowed. His introduction to Ithaca was through Jim Crow, northern Jim Crow, which supposedly didn't exist, right? The other thing he said, that in the summer of 1953 he gets a phone call from Thurgood Marshall. He's at Cornell, living in Ithaca, and Thurgood says, "Hey, John. What are you doing this summer? I've got a job for you. I want you to research school integration." John Hope Franklin, while in Ithaca, prepares a brief that becomes part of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Fascinating bit of Ithaca history. Here's a cat who has . . . and John Hope Franklin, as folks know, is one of the preeminent historians in America. Not one of the preeminent *black* historians. Preeminent historians. He's professor emeritus at Duke University. He's been at Harvard, Yale, Princeton. He's had *stints* everywhere. And also was responsible—was the lead researcher for President Clinton's Initiative on Race. Folks may recall that took place in 1996–97. So that part, to me, is important, because in 1955 . . . in 1954 we have Brown v. Board I, and in 1955 we have Brown v. Board II. Both those cases start to indicate that there's a shift in public education towards integration.

In Ithaca, that takes a different path. As we saw from some of the pictures, there was already racial integration in Ithaca to some degree, at least in schools. But then what we start in Ithaca is rural consolidation. In 1956 we officially consolidate 42 suburban—because that's what they were called, but if you think about it they were actually rural—school districts into the high school. Now these are small high schools, and frequently many students are already coming to Ithaca High School. But be it Ellis

Hollow, be it Brooktondale, be it Enfield, be it Caroline, all those students now come to Ithaca.

A report on Barbara Blais, who was a member of a class at Cornell University researching what consolidation could look like. And she says in her report, which she offers to the Board of Education in 1953, “A number of Ithaca people have told me they felt consolidation would be harmful to the school system. The main objections seemed to be that, bringing in schools of lower standards would necessarily lower the standards of city schools, and that the city would be unfairly burdened financially in making the necessary improvements in the facilities of the suburban districts.”

School consolidation wasn’t necessarily well accepted by all folks. There was a real concern about the lowering of academic standards and the quality of instruction that took place. We are going to see creeping in this history, not just a black/white rift but an urban—can I say “urban” in Ithaca?—a city/rural rift that’s taking place. And we find it primarily taking place when school consolidation happens in 1956.

The school consolidation meant that the school kept growing. The very first graduating class of Ithaca High School in 1875 was four students. When Jessie Johnson graduated in 1879 it was six students. Right? But it explodes relatively quickly. We know that in the earlier days, in the 1920s and ’30s, there were over 2,000 students at Ithaca High School at a certain point.

By 1956, a new school is needed. We have to build this structure, which was based on the California university model, as some folks claim. It has different buildings, outside doorways. It was airy. This school that was built, the current Ithaca High School, was considered to be one of the state-of-the-art institutions in the country. It provided for curricular exploration that the other building would not facilitate. It allowed access to new equipment, to have much more space. In fact, students keep remarking about how empty [the buildings] feel, because it was so much

larger than the single building before. The interesting thing is, the black students, what they comment on is how far it is. Right? We'll talk later about Paul McBride, who says one thing that's interesting about Ithaca is that we're taking the YMCA, which is meant to serve poor folks, and moved it up by the mall, to become a middle-class country club. That's not my words, those are Paul McBride's words, though I tend to agree. And we've taken the high school from downtown and moved it away from downtown.

Now at this point in time folks know probably that downtown Ithaca was youth country. Ithaca College is still in the early stages of trying to move up to the hill. We're talking about 3,000 college students downtown every single day. We're talking about 2,000 high school students downtown every single day. And the middle school is Central School, BJM, another 1,000 students. Six thousand young folks downtown every single school day. Downtown was Youth Central. Within 15 years, gone. Ithaca College is up the hill, the high school has moved away, and we begin thinking about building the middle school, so we only have the elementary school here. We find Ithaca demographics changing, at least the downtown community. I'm always shocked when people talk about the Commons being a place for young folks in Ithaca. It's always been a place for young folks.

But I also want to make sure that we don't lose sight of the fact that most of these photos have been in black and white intentionally. Even while some of these have been in color, I purposely put them into black and white because I didn't want there to be this division between what we think of as being historic, like George A. Johnson, and present-day. But we are talking about living history. In living color. We are talking about things that people remember. I'm sure folks in the room probably recall the building of Ithaca High School.

In 1961, the Council for Equality in Ithaca—which was a multiracial group made up of black folks, white folks, poor folks, working-class folks—was trying to work on issues of education equity, of housing discrimination, and of job employment. And what they say in the 1961 minutes is “Discussion centered around the recent incidents in Ithaca, involving high school students in inter-racial clashes. The background of these incidents was pieced together, and it was generally felt that more difficulties might be expected. Several people present had attended the meeting with the Mayor which had taken place after these incidents, and they reported that there had been general agreement at that meeting that there should be some sort of a permanent committee set up to deal with such problems.”

Some, what, 47 years ago? Fifty years ago? Half a century? Hey, Mayor, we need to have a committee to be able to deal with [racial tensions]. We see it in '44, we see it in '61. Pretty clear. And there's no doubt that the more that we dig into historical archives, probably the more of these references we'll find.

The Council on Equality is a fascinating organization. After the bombing of four little girls in Birmingham, AL, it helped organize and sponsor a march to the Dewitt Square. [*The Ithaca Journal*] claims upwards of 1,000 to 1,500 folks marched from the hills [comment from the audience]. They marched down from Buffalo Street to show a demonstration of solidarity. Ithaca is renowned for showing issues of [racial] solidarity. In 1851, when the Senate passed the Fugitive Slave Act, Ithacans put forth a piece of legislation to say: we *refuse* to negotiate with the Fugitive Slave Act, *refuse* to participate in that. In fact, if you can make it to Ithaca, we've got a spot for you. Can't get a room in a hotel, [laughter] but you've got a spot here. And that's partly why you find some folks coming here to Ithaca, and staying here. Ithacans' attempts at cross-racial reconciliation for me is nothing short of impressive. We can find it throughout the Ithaca area. We can find it happening constantly. And so, along

with the idea of oppression and racism, what we do find is these instances where there were cross-racial alliances.

In '65, [ICSD] Superintendent Mason put together what he called a Community Involvement Plan, saying that we should get the community involved in helping us to educate our students better. What a novel idea, right? That's where we find ourselves exactly today. Those folks who may have attended the Department of Justice two forums, the proposed plan of the Department of Justice is to come up with a community action plan. We have one. Don't date it, but we've got one. Go take a look at it. One of the things that Mason advocates is a tracking system. He says is that we should track students by ability. That various students have various skills and talents, and therefore we should, in essence, narrowly tailor our curriculum to make sure that they are responded to.

For those of us in educational circles, many of us believe that tracking is nothing short of second-generation segregation. It's a way to take integrated schools and segregate them. If you look at Ithaca High School currently, you will find in the AP/Honors classes 3 to 5 percent students of color. No, rephrase that: 3 to 5 percent black and brown students, even while they make up 15 percent of the student population. And so his advocacy of tracking is almost ironic. Here, he is saying that this is a program that is going to assist education and equity. And many of us today say that's partly the cause of educational inequity. It's a fascinating idea.

[The community plan] also talks about preschools, about health care. They talk about making the school a community center, and keeping it open at night, so we can actually use it as a living educational circle for adults as well as children. It's not just youth spaces. There are some pretty interesting ideas in this community action plan, which also is, in part, set up by the Council for Equality. You have a question now, Mr. Harris? [H: What are the implications of the fact that disadvantaged kids and folks

are there that early? I'm assuming it's the same thing that we would need now, but that's an assumption I'm not willing to make.] Yeah, it's not really . . . it's funny that the Council of Equality was really helping and working with Superintendent Mason. In fact, Ben Nichols's fingerprints are all over this plan. Those folks who know Ben Nichols, Ben was a long-term Ithacan. And you find his name frequently on the Council for Equality, along with people like Dr. Corinne Galvin, Dr. Ed Hart, Dr. Gibbs, and a number of folks in Ithaca who were part of this process. And so, "disadvantaged" in this part is really referring to those folks who have economic disadvantage. We're talking about poor folks, without saying so. Maybe we can get into this a little more afterwards?

So this is '65, that this plan comes out. And in doing my research, one of the things that I was struck by was an article by Claudia Montague, who says that frequently what took place on the college campuses didn't affect the downtown student population. Which for me is a laughable assertion. And I'm not saying that I don't value Claudia's work, because it's, again, been instructive for me. But for those folks who know the black community here, if you weren't allowed to stay in the dorm, you stayed with black folks. Again, Alpha Phi Alpha, the very first national black fraternity, begins in Ithaca, New York, in 1906, partly happening on State Street, and partly beginning in the basement of the Southside—not Southside, excuse me—in the AME Zion Church. There's a reason why it happened. Those folks were at church, they were already part of the local black community.

Folks may have read the book, *Cornell '69*, which takes a sort of different take on the aftermath of the Willard Straight takeover, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning picture. I can't find a decent picture which includes the top part. This is actually the best part of this picture, which says, "Welcome Parents" [laughter]. But the Willard

Straight takeover takes place at—during Parents’ Weekend when Tom Smith and those folks come out with their bandoliers and their guns.

In my graduate work at Cornell University I spent a good deal of time at Africana, and I’m talking to some of the elder Africana folks. They were always clear to make a point to remind me that when the takeover happened, there were no guns in the building. It was upon threats from some of the local [white] fraternities, that they were going to storm the building violently, then guns were smuggled in. And [guns] were smuggled in by local black high school students. To say that there was no connection between college and university students and the local black community is laughable, in some respects.

This takes place in March, right? March or April. The previous September, the high school forms the Afro-American Club. Now, this title always kills me, right? “Negroes Form New Club.” Even though they are calling themselves Afro-Americans. Black folks are already working for self-determination and self-definition, even while the Ithaca High School yearbook says something different. But within five months of each other, we find Cornell demanding . . . students at Cornell demanding to have a curriculum that’s much more responsive to their needs and educational lives. And black students at the high school saying the exact same thing. To think that somehow there wasn’t any cohesive discussion . . . for me, I guess, I can’t see that.

We also have, in the same year, the beginning of what would later be known as the Assistant Principal for Minority Student Affairs. At that point in time it was called the Black Counseling Service. The Black Counseling Service begins in 1969, with local black families demanding that the high school be more responsive to their counseling needs. It’s a direct partnership between the high school and Southside Community Center. And, again, has different hours, open during the evening. The very first director, or the very first person who’s in that counseling service decided not

to house his office at the high school. That's not where black folks are. We're not at the high school, we're at the Southside Community Center. Now people will be able to come at 3pm, when school gets out, to 8pm. Come see me. Again, and coming off this idea of Cornell '69, we have the same thing if you talk about IHS '69 as well.

We're winding down to the end, here. In 1976, Ithaca decided it was going to redistrict. There had been demographic shifts in Ithaca for quite some time. In fact, we know that all communities are in constant flux. Ithaca is no different. And so, as part of a report that was offered to the Board of Education in '76, (?) says, "It was overwhelmingly clear that the Ithaca community feels strongly about its schools, and holds dear the role education plays in their lives and in those of their school children . . . There were segments of the community which expressed the sentiment that discrimination between the 'haves and have-nots' is in evidence in the schools and should be eliminated . . . There was a great concern that closing a neighborhood school might spell the decline of a neighborhood unity and cohesiveness." There were segments of the community which expressed the sentiment that discrimination between the *haves* and the *have-nots* is evidence in the schools, and should be eliminated. There was a great concern that closing a neighborhood school might spell the decline of a neighborhood unity and cohesiveness.

But in '76 we close Henry St. John School. We also close Cayuga Heights and West Hill. We sell the Henry St. John building. We don't sell Cayuga Heights. In fact, it's bought back for a dollar, as the famed story goes. Here is an example of where the *have-gots* and the *have-nots* may have played a part in what school gets closed . . . not what school gets closed but what school gets sold. Right? We know that Henry St. John never opens again. In fact, it sort of begins black students going to Central School in larger mass. Henry St. John is on the corner of Geneva and Clinton. Again, not too far from my house. We also know we have gone through a couple of

redistrictings. Went through it again in '87, and went through it again in '90. A small group in '96 if I'm not mistaken, and then again in 2004, as some folks know.

[Poor audio - no transcription of WHCU's Night Sounds Program radio clip
1:03:55—1:06:23.]

We're going to jump back briefly to a quote that came as a result of Ithaca's centennial. Ithaca begins in 1888. In 1988 there was a centennial celebration, including a book, edited by Carol Kammen, called *A Day in Ithaca, May 17, 1988*, where Ithacans were asked to have a Great Ithaca Write-In. [The Centennial Committee] asked folks to send in entries about what their day was like. And so they collected a good portion of these and published them in a book. One of the entries was an entry by Ithaca College professor Paul McBride. And McBride states, "Ithaca itself is a colonized community. Moreover, as a college professor, I am one of the colonizers. My nation is Academia. In the last 120 years or so, the academics (as citizens of this nation are called) have taken over the city, shaped its values, its entertainment, its public school system and even its government. The 'greasers' or 'farmers,' as offspring of the academics call the natives, flunk out of school at shamefully high rates. They graduate from tracked programs which guarantee them a career no higher than a McDonald's manager . . . They have not so much failed school, as school them. Ithaca's schools have become the institutional tools of the colonizers, preparing their children for positions of influence in the nation of Academia. Even organizations historically dedicated to service the native of the inner city, such as the YMCA, have become the servant of the upper middle class. The YMCA is no longer downtown, near the poor, but instead enjoys a fashionable location near the out-of-town shopping mall where its function is not unlike that of

middle class country club. We academics convince ourselves that the greasers, townies and farmers are better off with our influence. Such is the thinking of colonizers throughout history.”

That is also one of my favorite quotes, and I see one of my students here from the class I’m teaching this semester called “Education, Oppression, Liberation.” The course began with this reading by Paul McBride. We’re trying to explore looking at Ithaca through a colonized framework. What would it mean if McBride were correct? If Ithaca really was a colonized community, would post-colonial theory provide direction? Reading people like Albert Memmi, and Cessaire, and other folks like Freire, trying to look at it from this context. There’s some resistance to doing that, for obvious reasons. But it poses an interesting idea, to explore the notion that the *nation of academia* has severe influence over everything that takes place in this community. And it’s not about Cornell. I mean, Cornell *is* the giant on the hill, but there are other giants in this community as well. Folks know three of the top five employers in Ithaca are educational institutions. It’s what we do. Education is our industry.

Moving on, this is a quote from a report done by the late Dr. Barr and Dave Bock. [The researchers] were looking at a retrospective study of race and class at Ithaca High School. They end the report with the following: “The reality is that those at the bottom of the hierarchy of economic stratification have a great deal in common. They have experienced systemic oppression for hundreds of years. They share a common socio-economic class experience defined by limited life chances. Keeping the poor poor, and keeping the dark and white skinned fighting each other for scarce resources is part of the plan to keep them in their place and in conflict with each other. If an interracial group of low income poor families were to organize and challenge the injustice their children experience in school, they could be a powerful force for change.”

They're trying to document the way in which, similar to what the Board said, that *race and class seem to be predictors of student success*, or seem to be a part of whether or not a student will succeed. I think that's a better way of saying it. Dr. Barr and Dave Bock were trying to explore this idea through data. What does the data tell us? Who succeeds, who's in what classes, who's going to find themselves in special education? They find pretty strong correlations between race and class, and a number of disproportionately negative experiences.

In the interest of time, I've decided not to keep hitting you all with quotes and photos. Racial tensions in the community happened in my first year here, in 1996–97. There was an incident in the Ithaca High School parking lot. There was a march that took place. It was reported not just in the *Ithaca Journal* but the *Syracuse Standard*, the *Binghamton Sun*, the *Elmira Gazette*. It got a little bit of [media] play at that point of time.

In '99 we had an unfortunate incident that took place in Caroline at a high school graduation party. In 2000 we had an unfortunate incident that took place at Pete's grocery store. And most recently, in 2004, we know that there was a relatively large racial incident that happened. I became most intimately involved in 2004. In part, because of self-preservation, in part because of familial obligations. Our daughter was a student at Ithaca High School. A graduate and alumnus of Ithaca High School now, but not in 2004. So when these fights took place, given my role in the district and the attention to my research, I felt it was incumbent upon me to try to participate in this process.

Again, because I wanted to understand what my daughter was bringing home with her every day, right? There was real concern and fear for folks' lives. Just like this past time when 700–800 students stayed home, the same thing took place in 2004.

There was a day when a lot of folks stayed home. There were threats of a hit list. Threats of violence.

One thing that I was able to do was to facilitate conversations with a pretty diverse group of folks, including the quote-unquote “hick” folks who supposedly wear camo, right? That whole camouflage identity. Colors at Ithaca High School have a pretty interesting history as well. If you wear camouflage or red or blue, you’re in trouble. Like they send you home. The black students who wear red or blue get sent home. And the students who wear camouflage get talked about as well. There’s a funny thing about this idea of color.

With this facilitation I was able to learn a great deal of things. One of the things we did was ask almost all, at this point in time, 1,600 students, “What is going on at Ithaca High School from your perspective? We really want to hear from the students.” We gave half-sheets of paper with questions so they could write some things down. And then we collated and transcribed the responses into a single document. One question and response stopped me in my tracks. The question asked, “What is going on at Ithaca High School,” and a student wrote in big, bold letters, with exclamation point, exclamation point, “I feel absolutely safe. I’m in honors classes and therefore do not know or encounter the kind of people who fight in the halls.” And that was basically all I needed to see about that.

Students had been telling me for years that the high school was like two different schools, and I couldn’t quite grasp it until I saw it in that format. I mean, there’s one way to sort of see it and know it intellectually. It’s another way to see it on paper and how people respond to it. In other words, if these black folks and poor white folks fight each other, why bother me about it? Let me go about my business. It was almost the same way for me when this most recent protest took place. The school had a lockdown, to get *back* to education; as if what the students were doing wasn’t part of

an educational experience. They were trying to demand a different—better—educational experience.

Two quick quotes and then we'll leave it alone. One is from the students themselves when they organized the 2007 walkout. And if you read their letter, which doesn't get any press anywhere, they explain their actions, clearly. It predates the talks of violence. This letter came out immediately, the day of the walkout, or the day after: "We walked out of school for a reason, not because we are 'class-cutting trouble-makers.' The Countdown to Equality is not about violence. It is about justice. We want equality. We want an end to discrimination of all kinds in the ICSD. Despite what has happened so far, and the obstacles we have faced, this campaign is not over. We want to remember yesterday, but live for tomorrow!"

Pretty profound for a group of 17- and 18-year-olds. And it shouldn't surprise us, because 17- and 18-year-olds *are* profound. In the research that I do, almost every major global movement, social change, is from young folks. When we talk about the Civil Rights movement, yes, we had people like King, we had Ralph Abernathy, but it was 11-to-12-year-olds who sparked the movement, right? We could talk about Tiananmen Square in China, we could talk about what took place in Korea, we could talk about a whole bunch of social movements. It's students; it's young people that make this happen. And here they are, the very embodiment of that. Here's a photo from the protest, outside the Board building, and they're saying, they're chanting, "What do we want? Justice. When do we want it? Now." And if I was going to break my thing, I would show you a video, but I'm not going to do that.

The advent of technology is amazing. Students of mine were getting text messages in class. Talk about this connection between college students and high school students. I'm giving a lecture in class, and I have a pretty strong no-text policy. If you're texting, the phone is now mine. But I have students texting in front. I ask,

“What are you doing? Like either going to leave class, or we’ll have a conversation.” They respond, “I’m sorry. Students are walking out of the school. Can you hold on for a second?” And he pulls up a video. Within five minutes, the video came from the high school to my classroom. We put on the computer and showed the class. [some chatter]

In conclusion, and in achieving equity, the question then becomes where and how? As the *Journal* says, we are in “one of the worst racially charged messes in school district (and area) history.” Are we in one of the worst racially charged messes in school district history? That’s how the *Journal* editorialized in 2007. I could ask the question, “Are we?” I don’t know if we are, historically. I do know we have serious and long-standing equity issues. And I do know is that the next event is being hosted by Barry Derfel. Thank you.

[Applause . . . and discussion follows, not transcribed]

CHAPTER 7:

POLICY INITIATIVES AND CONCLUSIONS

Students as Policy Makers

Interviewing students about their educational experiences reflects a belief in students' ability to transform schools. It was hypothesized that black students would have intimate knowledge about their academic program as well as solid suggestions for a course of action. Black students could, as required by Ithaca City School District Policy 0350, offer "a critical appraisal of the educational program" and "highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the program and plans for correction of any weaknesses" (ICSD Policy 0350, 2002, May 14).

While the policy initiatives listed on the following pages emanate from the student's narratives, they are obviously my translation. The policy initiatives are informed by the voice of the participants as well as my reading, research, and experience in Ithaca schools. If Freire (1970/2000) defines *praxis* as the word and the work (p. 87), then the goal was to actualize a form of praxis. As intuitively and organically as possible, these initiatives outlined here use the students' words to guide the work. They are listed below in no particular order or grouping.

Classroom Space

Policy initiative: *Create educational spaces that are comfortable, that are visually appealing, and that contain multiple avenues for information exchange.*

How educational spaces look, how they function, and how they connect information/people are core arguments debated in scholarship. Social networking and socialization have been an explicit/integral argument for the expansion of schooling (Spring, 2004). Dewey (1916) highlights the socializing function of schools at the

center of his call for democracy. The same can be claimed about Horace Mann's arguments for upward mobility.

One policy recommendation that arises from the transcripts involves educational and classroom spaces. When asked about their most and least favorite places, interviewees highlighted the desire for multi-use spaces that encourage social and technological interactions. Half of the interviewees cited an assistant/principal's office as their least favorite space. This response appears to be directly linked to disciplinary practices, and office spaces were frequently described as cold and cramped. In somewhat similar fashion, classrooms were described as "crowded and chaotic." The library, however, was frequently cited as a favorite space. Participants described the library as open, carpeted, and comfortable. While references to interpersonal and aesthetic comfortableness were common at various points in the interviews, students spoke directly of the library as a place to access computers/information and to interact with peers.

As with the mass adoption of any new technologies, there is a shift in how people exchange and process information. In the 21st century, students are rarely without access to wireless/instant communication devices and frequently engage in social networking opportunities. Wikis—commonly believed to be shorthand for "what I know is"—serve as proof of the most recent shift in information exchange and processing.

In short, wikis allow users to collectively create, add, and modify content. They have become one of the most utilized—and for many, the most trusted—depositories of information.³⁸ Wikis could not be sustained without a belief in communal learning and knowledge production. No longer is the model one of solitude and reading by candlelight. Younger generations engage in a process that is

³⁸ Battle of Britannica. (2006, April). *Economist*, Retrieved July 25, 2008, from Academic Search Premier database.

collectively didactic and dynamic. Creating learning spaces that highlight the educational aspects of libraries—in other words, spaces that promote social and informational networking—may have a positive impact on educational outcomes.

Discipline Protocols

Policy Initiative: *Rewrite staff/student behavior codes that minimize punitive and reactive discipline approaches to emphasize preventive and restorative approaches.*

Concerns over discipline procedures are found throughout the interview transcripts. For young men, stories of actual and potential physical altercations were found in each of the interviews. Elijah states, “I mean you could either get in a fight at the high school or end up getting expelled or suspended or something.” The numerous stories of actual violence and repeated references to an omnipresent possibility of violence were jarring. The position of violence as commonplace in the lives of young men was a clear gender-specific difference. For the young men, the potential for violence was never far. Beyond the physical harm, this also could mean suspension or expulsion from school. This is also not intended to indicate that young women were free from the threat of violence. Rather, it was rarely given voice during the interviews.

There was greater similarity on the approach and nature of school discipline. Both young men and young women talked about the meting out of unequal punishments. These conversations often included stories of harsher consequences and added supervision, surveillance, and suspicion. Isaiah stated, “It’s just that black students end up getting in more trouble than the—the white students—cuz people are—teachers are looking for them more than white students.” Brianna spoke of similar concerns:

I just feel like minority students are not encouraged to do well . . . and even like if you—if someone does something wrong, like, gets in trouble, it seems like the minority student for a little thing will get kicked out for a longer period of time than a white kid who does something like major and they'll be back like the next day.

There are additional examples throughout the transcripts. In what may appear to contradict students' perceptions, *The Final Report of Race and Education at Ithaca High School*, by Drs. Turner and Barr, speaks to a no-less troubling phenomenon. Barr and Turner (1998) write,

Seventy five of the 100 responses showed a high level of discomfort and fear about disciplining African American and Latino/Latina students . . . Overall the responses to this question describe a school environment where teachers, staff and administrators are hesitant when interacting with students of color and even worse, so uncomfortable and afraid that they avoid setting behavioral limits and academic demands. Permissiveness is a subtle and powerful form of rejection, and these data indicate that African American males in particular are allowed to roam freely with little accountability for both their behavior and academic work. (p. 5)

There are multiple approaches to gauging the accuracy of student perceptions, and statistical data and history indicate a troubling phenomenon when it comes to black students and discipline. The *timeloop* (Appendix 5) contains multiple expressions of concern regarding disproportionate discipline and punishment. Radio interviews, student documentaries, and research reports document the prominence and concern over disproportionate disciplinary actions.

Additionally, statistical data from the ICSD First Annual Equity Report Card (AERC) (2006) as well as the ICSD Second Annual Equity Report Card (2008) reveal racial and socioeconomic differences in suspensions. Though black and brown students make up 19 percent of the student population, they contribute to 53 percent of all out-of-school suspensions (ICSD AERC, 2008, p. 32). The racial disproportionality is wide enough to cause concern at the state level. The New York State Department of

Education has “cited the Ithaca City School District for having a significant discrepancy in the long-term suspensions of black students with disabilities for a second consecutive year.”³⁹

Last, there is a pending court judgment in the case of *Kearney vs. ICSD* (2008). If the recommendation stands as written, the Kearney decision would require the Ithaca City School District to pay compensation of \$1,000,000.00USD and, among other things, to “review, redesign, revise, adopt and implement a new student disciplinary code to incorporate effective progressive discipline and effective practices for changing student behavior” (p. 12). There is more local research to cite (Barr & Bock, 2000; Ferguson, 2007) and an expanding body of national scholarship around *the discipline gap* (Gregory & Mosley, 2004; Monroe, 2006). However, the specter of a second citation from the New York State Department of Education and a looming court order should serve as all the justification needed for the radical overhauling of current disciplinary practices.

Sheets and Gay (1996) argue, “the search for new strategies should begin with a careful diagnosis of the causes” (para. 2). Frequently, it is recommended to explore the impact of cultural mismatches. In other words, “given existing knowledge about cultural norms across race, ethnicity and social class, contrasts in behavioral norms between teachers and students may provide fertile ground for misunderstandings that contribute to the discipline gap” (Monroe, 2006, p. 323). Given the pronounced racial disparities, and the existence of an apparent school-to-prison pipeline, any overhaul should include protections against racial biases in disciplinary policies. Equally important, schools should consider the current scholarship on positive and relational disciplinary approaches.

³⁹ Sanders, T. “For 2nd year, ICSD cited for suspensions discrepancy.” *Ithaca Journal*, p. 1B.

Testing and Assessment

Policy Initiative: *Develop and implement multiple forms of academic assessment above and beyond reliance on standardized tests.*

When asked about the best way to demonstrate what they have learned, some students responded quickly with tests, homework, and long-answer essays. However, many echoed Brianna's comments: "I don't think you can really judge if you're receiving a good education based on test scores." To show what they have learned, many students wanted to be asked. Jayden responded, "Straight up ask—write down what you learned." For Jordan, "Talk, like this right here. Speaking and stuff." Jada stated that we should "Ask some students what they learned," and Kayla answered, "Some test are okay, but ask, 'what did you learn?'" In other words, schools should consider ways to increase orality in the learning process and assessment.

The possibilities of such assessments run counter to a growing trend. Since the issuance of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), there has been a strong, national push for employing standardized tests as the measure of academic achievement. The implementation of NCLB solidified this policy approach. At present, students in New York State take twenty-one standardized tests before reaching high school. In order to earn a fully accredited diploma, students must take/pass at least an additional eight exams. What is more, colleges recommend multiple Advance Placement tests and usually require at least one college entrance exam. All told, a student's educational history is forced into high-stakes performance on thirty-plus standardized exams. David Hursh (2008) writes, "Increasingly, classrooms are places in which teachers and students act out the script given to them by someone else, neither teachers nor students ask questions that matter, and learning is equated with passing a test" (p. 3).

There is resistance to the onslaught of standardized tests. First, many scholars have made compelling arguments that standardized tests are, by design, undergirded

with racial/economic bias and are unable to accurately assess the very phenomena they are purported to measure (Black, 2003; Gould, 1996; Lehmann, 1999; Sacks, 1999).

While it is not yet the trend, a notable number of schools have moved away from standardized tests. Lewin (2008) reports, “The number of colleges and universities where such tests are now optional—mostly small liberal-arts colleges—has been growing steadily as more institutions have become concerned about the validity of standardized tests in predicting academic success, and the degree to which test performance correlates with household income, parental education and race.”⁴⁰

Nicolas Lemann (1999) notes that James Conant, former Harvard University president and the first board chairman of the Educational Testing Service, would not be pleased with modern uses of the SAT Reasoning test. Lehmann comments in the PBS *Frontline* episode “Secrets of the SAT” (Chandler, 1999), “If Conant were alive today and he saw the incredible energy and money that the ‘haves’ in America put into using essentially his test to make sure their children will be ‘haves’ also, I think he’d be severely disappointed by that.”

Pedagogically—and schizophrenically—most teacher training programs require their students to graduate by exhibition. The creation of teaching portfolios is a standard preservice requirement. Portfolios typically include educational philosophies, sample lesson plans, copies of assessments, classroom management plans, videos, evaluations, and more. Portfolios are collected over the length of study and usually include reflection pieces. In other words, teachers are asked to demonstrate their learning by compiling work over an extended length of time, but students must demonstrate their learning with bubble sheets in three-hour blocks.

By way of policy, much about assessment requirements are decided at the state level. However, there is some departmental/classroom flexibility, and Ithaca has a

⁴⁰ “2 Colleges End Entrance Exams,” 2008, May 27, *New York Times*.

public high school that has been actively involved in challenging New York's high-stakes testing. As Martin Luther King (1967) writes, "A democratic educational system requires multiple doors" (p. 198). Other Ithaca and area schools should join this effort. Simultaneously, curriculum work could focus on the creation of more comprehensive forms of assessment. Graduation by exhibition—or showing by doing—is one possible model possible (McDonald, Smith, Turner, Finney, & Barton, 1993). Beyond alternate forms of assessment, it is clear from student interviews that educators could practice more listening. Or, as many of the participants stated, if we want to know what students have learned, we could ask.

Teachers and Teaching

Policy Initiative: *Increase budget, support, and resources for staff development as a means to ensure a highly effective and culturally competent staff.*

Some of the most direct and concrete policy recommendations emanating from student interviews revolve around teachers and teaching. Participants were clear that teachers needed to possess cultural competencies in order to be effective in the classroom. Aaliyah remarked, "You know, I think that a lot of teachers have never really experienced that many black students in the class first of all." Jayden stated, "When teachers don't take the race thing serious, students don't take school seriously." Such comments were repeated with regularity and indicate that continued staff development around culturally responsiveness is essential (Barr & Turner, 1998; Gay, 2000).

Kayla wanted teachers with more knowledge of pop culture. For her, "students have more respect for them." Shania talked about teachers having that "it" factor. There was general agreement that good teachers were energetic, knowledgeable, funny, approachable, and demanding. Brandon adds that while humor is great, there

must be a balance. His favorite teacher tells jokes but “knows when to get down to business and when to joke.” When Brandon was asked to expand on his ideas of good teaching, the following exchange occurred.

SEB: So, what do you think makes a good teacher?

Brandon: [Pause] I think what makes a good teacher, is someone that wants you to do well. And that if they see you falling behind they’ll encourage you instead of trying to discourage you saying, “Maybe you should switch out of my class, maybe you should do something easier.” I like teachers that try to challenge you to succeed instead of try to discourage you.

Brandon’s response, and those of others, add weight to Ronald Ferguson’s (2002) theory of encouragement as a *distinctively important* motivator of black student achievement (p. 25).

Ferguson (2002) defines encouragement as the “assurances from teachers that students have the ability to succeed and teacher behaviors that provide active support for success” (p. 15). In this regard, a key component for most participants was not just that teachers had high expectations but that teachers also worked with students to ensure success. Jordan’s favorite teacher “encouraged me to like keep going and like get my grade up.” Aaliyah remarked, “One of the best teachers I ever had . . . what they did was make each student feel like they were powerful in their class. You know—just that they were capable of learning a wide range of things, and meeting expectations of—you know—academic world.” The role and importance of *encouragement* may help explain why Crowther and Martin (2005) write that a fundamental shift in policy must move from “providing education to encouraging learning” (p. 7).

One of the clearest ways to discourage learning is to hold low expectations. During her interview, Brianna stated, “I feel like minority students at my school are

not encouraged to do well.” Thus, whether it is Pygmalion in the classroom (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), or a self-fulfilling prophecy (Wilkins, 1976), or the supposed “soft bigotry of low expectations,”⁴¹ educational outcomes are highly dependent upon educational expectations. Regrettably, interviewees revealed a number of experiences regarding teachers who held low—and in some cases no—expectations.

In short, good teaching and good teachers can dramatically increase student learning—and subsequently, achievement (Carey, 2003). Ferguson (2002) writes, “The special importance of encouragement highlights the likely importance of strong teacher-student relationships in affecting achievement, especially for African American and Hispanic students” (pp. 25–26). Frequently, forming strong teacher-student relationships is dependent upon a teacher’s cultural competencies.

If teachers are to develop cultural competencies and become expert teachers who are highly effective, staff development is crucial. This is particularly true given that the overwhelming majority of teachers and staff in most districts are returning veterans and are white. We will return to the racial composition of school faculty momentarily. Nonetheless, fully supporting staff development is essential to promoting the growth and competency of all teachers. Ideally, the hiring and promotion process would also clearly articulate the possession/demonstration of cultural competencies as an essential requirement. Moreover, it is time for districts to move beyond *highly qualified* teachers and move toward *highly effective* teachers. Increased development opportunities for returning veterans and hiring highly effective candidates would help to shift the climate and culture of Ithaca schools.

⁴¹ President Bush Addresses NAACP Annual Convention. (2006, July 20). White House Press Release. Retrieved on June 19, 2008, from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060720.html>

Black Staff

Policy Initiative: *Revamp pre-employment, interview, and mentoring process in order to effectively recruit and retain ALANA faculty and staff.*⁴²

The most common policy recommendation originating with participants involved the racial makeup of the faculty and staff. When asked, “How can schools find ways to better support black students?,” Kayla replied, “Yeah—easily having more staff of color. I think that would make a tremendous difference.” Participants made a number of references to the desire for more black faculty. This exchange with Shania is one example.

SEB: So then, from your perspective, how do you think your peers or your friends feel about school?

Shania: Everyone hates school . . . I mean hate is such a strong word but this is just quoted right out of their mouth. “I hate the—I hate the high school.” I mean, they just feel outnumbered. There’s so many white staff that do white things and there’s not really that many black superiors in the high school that you can go to to talk to and like real people that you actually know care. I mean, there’s a couple but there’s not enough to spread out within the black community within the school.

SEB: So, the school should have more black staff and faculty?

Shania: Definitely. More—definitely more bla—African American faculty members.

SEB: And how . . . what do you think that would do?

Shania: It would create—like it would equal things out. It would create a balance. I mean, very rarely does a black student have a problem with another white teacher and then go and pour out their feelings to another white person. Like, it’s just—growing up black you’re just—you, you have different morals, you’re taught different things and one of those things, well maybe everyone—maybe everyone’s different but I know just from my friends and myself, like, what happens at home or within the family, stays that way. You don’t

⁴² ALANA: imperfect acronym for African, Latino, Asian, and Native American.

take it to school. So, if there was like black people there that understood the things that go on in the lives of black teenagers, black youth, black people period, there would be that outlet in school for them to go to instead of having to hold everything together and not trust people. I mean there are a lot of good white people in the school—they're a lot of good teachers—but it would create a balance. It would equal everything out.

History indicates that black faculty play a critical role in ensuring black student achievement (Dee, 2004; Siddle Walker, 2001). Some scholars argue that there is a difference in the way black and white teachers view the origins and solutions of the achievement gap (Ferguson, 2003). Other scholars talk about differences in pedagogy (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003). Nearly all are in agreement that increasing the representation of black faculty is needed if we are to increase the educational outcomes of black students.

One of the assumptions students hold about black faculty is a sense of *shared* or *fictive kinship*. When students speak of the role of black faculty, they frequently talk of understanding and shared experiences. When Jayden was asked about his favorite teacher, he responded, “I could relate to him because he sorta been through the things that I went through in life so I can relate to him on that basis and in teaching, he has a certain way to put stuff—for African American students—better than other teachers can.” In short, black students—like all students—need to see themselves reflected in their teachers and their schools. A racially diverse teaching staff helps to make this a reality.

This is not an argument for racial essentialism. Of course not all black faculty effectively teach black students, and not all black students effectively learn from black faculty. Yes, race-matching appears to have a positive effect on student learning. However, as Dee (2004) warns,

[T]he most important caveat is that this study tells us little about why the racial match between students and teachers seems to matter. Noting this is especially

important since the results could be construed narrowly as supporting increased racial segregation of teachers and students as a means of improving overall achievement. Not only is this interpretation blind to the potentially adverse social consequences of such a policy, but it also ignores the possibility of more balanced policies informed by an improved understanding of why the racial interactions between students and teachers influence student outcomes. Learning why, for instance, white teachers are not as effective with black students as black teachers appear to be might suggest improvements in training that could make teachers equally effective for all students, regardless of race. (p. 59)

Most importantly, a diverse faculty affirms the purpose/practice of education. If education is for all people—then schools must be a reflection. To tell students school is important while they are not represented—in the curriculum or in the faculty—only spotlights the disconnect. If it was important—and if it were for all—it would look so. Otherwise, school becomes a lie. When working, schools make students believe. But schools can easily engage the wrong kind of make-believe.

According to the ICSD First Annual Report Card (2006), African-American, Latino, Asian, Native American (ALANA) staff make up between 4 and 6% of all faculty over the past decade. This is substantially different from the city population (25% people identified as ALANA) or the ICSD student population (28% ALANA students).⁴³ Given that white teachers make up 95% of ICSD faculty members, significant numbers of students complete middle and high school without being assigned a single nonwhite faculty member. Brandon was not alone when he commented, “I haven’t had a single African American teacher.”

Unless students are home-schooled, compulsory education laws usually translate to their sitting in schools for 6–7 hours each day, 180 days each year, and for 12 or more consecutive years. Schools are—as intended by those who define their operations—the most formative institutions in the lives of young people (Spring,

⁴³ Ithaca, NY 2000 Factsheet. Retrieved on August 1, 2008 from <http://www.census.gov>. Also, see the Ithaca City School District Annual Equity Report Card—First (2006) and Second (2008) editions.

2001). Moreover, many current reform initiatives seek to increase the time spent at schools by creating longer school days and extending the academic calendar (Tough, 2006). For young people, schools are a place where life's dramas unfold in living color and in real/extended time. The difference in racial composition between where students learn and where students live may explain why they frequently refer to anything outside of the classroom as *the real world*.

Thus, even while "race continues to shape student-teacher dynamics in ways that turn out badly for black students" (Downey & Pribesh, 2004, p. 279), the rationale for increasing the number of black faculty extends far beyond black students. Beyond the benefits to black students, an essential rationale for increasing the representation of black faculty is that all students benefit. Education is replete with references to varied approaches and pedagogies: differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, diversified curriculums, heterogeneous classrooms, and more. Black faculty help to ensure that all students are exposed to a variety ways of knowing and learning.

Nonetheless, there are times when hiring black faculty may actually do harm, particularly if a school climate is not conducive to fostering the professional development of black faculty. Possible differences in pedagogy, course approach, and content delivery mean that "school districts need to take proactive steps to scrutinize their organizational culture and create an environment that is supportive to African Americans and teachers of color" (Mabokela & Madsen, 2003, p. 108). Failing to create a supportive environment ensures failure and further erodes school community.

As indicated in the timeloop, hiring and retaining black faculty has been a focus of community groups and ICSD initiatives for some time. There have been a couple of attempts to create solutions. *Pathways to Teaching* was a program designed to assist teaching assistants in earning baccalaureate degrees as well as New York State certification. *Be a Hero, Be a Teacher* is a collaborative program designed to

encourage ICSD students to consider the field of education. These programs made their way into the transcripts.

SEB: Throughout your high school career have you had a favorite class. A class you thought that was a great class?

Shania: Umm. [long pause]

SEB: Or a class that you feel you really learned a lot in?

Shania: The class that I learned the most in high school was my explorations in teaching class . . . Which I took in my junior year. It was taught by [name] and it was basically anything that you would learn in your first year of college about early childhood education and education overall. They didn't have enough money for it so they took it out of the budget. I actually wrote [the superintendent] myself to try to keep the class because I thought it was something that was important. It didn't even matter if you want to go into teaching, it was just a really good class I think.

SEB: What made the class good?

Shania: The teacher and the actually curriculum was very informative. I mean, I learned, I learned so much in that class. Like that might be the one thing that I will never forget about high school just because it—not only made me, you know, like think and try to learn new things, I was with a group of very, very—everyone was completely different. I was the only black person in the class which, of course, is always like, “Oh my, there's nobody in here like me.” And when I first got in there I was like, “Psst, I'm gonna switch this class, I'm not staying in here. It's just not gonna work.” And she seemed like she was just caught up in her own little circle and everything but by the end of the year, it was like our own little family. Everybody was really close and worked together. And I just really liked it because it forced me to adapt to a new environment without too many people and be in different situations. We went all around Ithaca, and we went to [local] schools. We went and read children's books, ah, we made children's books, we learned about cognitive development, we learned about all types of stuff. It was just a really good class.

In the fall of 2007, the ICSD BoE also received a petition sponsored by the Village at Ithaca. The petition examined the ICSD's human resources policies and practices.

Speaking directly to the need for increases in the retention and recruitment of ALANA faculty, the petition states, “it is important that honoring diversity is at the forefront of hiring teachers and that new hires are dedicated to being part of a multicultural education system that challenges racism and discrimination and additionally challenges all students to succeed” (Tibbett, 2007, p. 9).

In fact, an ICSD policy already exists regarding workforce diversity. Accordingly, the district “welcomes its responsibility to employ a staff that best meets the needs of all students of the District . . . the district will strive to recruit, employ and retain a workforce that is reflective of the community” (ICSD Policy 9110.1—Workforce Diversity, Revised 2005, December 6).

There are many ways this policy can be interpreted and implemented, but as written, there is symmetry between the request of the students and the written policy. There is also general agreement that the recruitment and retention of a racially diverse faculty requires the assistance of the larger Ithaca community—community organizations, the business sector, major employers, houses of worship, and so forth. Thus, the recommendation is to be not only creative but also transparent in implementation. Community resources and expertise are essential to the recruitment and retention of ALANA faculty and staff. But the fact remains: it is the district’s responsibility to perform its due diligence in order to marshal the necessary partnerships and resources in the interest of all students.

Relevancy of Curriculum

Policy Initiative: *Undergo significant curricular reforms in order to have content/pedagogy that is reflective of and relevant to the lives of black students.*

The student calls for curriculum reform were broad and simultaneously pointed. First, interviewees expressed awareness that the school pedagogy and content

were not necessarily designed for them. As Brandon stated, “I think sometimes black students don’t adjust to learning, you know, a course, system designed for white people.” And Aaliyah spoke to a similar idea and remarked, “[T]he basic structure of schools is built more for white, middle-class individuals.” For Shania, it was more encompassing. She stated, “It’s usually all white stuff—learning about white people all the time.” During her interview, Jada remarked, “I just always feel like I’m learning someone else’s history or am I learning—or is this my history? . . . but I think where were all these African Americans when they were making this constitution?” Brandon appeared to unknowingly offer an answer, “It’s predominately white so of course they’re gonna talk about white history.” It was clear from the interviews that students expressed strong feelings of curricular dislocation and alienation. This has been replicated in different eras and in different locales. As a result, the calls for Afrocentric and multicentered infusions should not surprise policy makers. As Isaiah stated, “All you hear is about white history but you hear it over and over again, And there’s gotta be times when you can fit in some black history more than it is now.”

Many students talked about their frustration with curriculum content. For many students, learning about black people is limited to Black History Month and is focused only on what can be termed *civil black studies*—that is, there is a fixation on teaching *only* the Civil War and only Civil Rights. Isaiah would go on to add that he would like “to learn more about black history because you don’t hear about it most often except the one month we have.”

The topic of slavery was one content area that created tension. Jordan: “When the slavery topic comes up, it’s just—I’m ready to snap at anybody you know who says the wrong thing.” Brandon told of an experience in his class. “Slavery came up, one kid said, ‘If slavery was so successful, why was it abolished?’ The teacher didn’t

say anything. She just stood there.” The lack of teacher response is troubling and also telling of the approach to curricular content.

Rarely does the teaching of black history focus on organized/everyday forms of resistance. Rarely—as indicated by George Lipsitz’s (1999) retelling of Bill Moore’s life—does black history include stories of cross-racial and cross-economic collaborations. Stories of Hoxie, AK—where a community voluntarily and successfully integrated its students—are removed from the historical canon. Rarely does the teaching of black history allow for agency and actors. While Brianna stated that “black people don’t know their history,” Shania stated that her African American history class was “one of two classes that made me a different person.”

Students were also concerned that their education was irrelevant and did not adequately prepare them for life after high school. Elijah stated, “Cuz you goin be teaching a set—a bunch of like unnecessary stuff that people don’t need.” And Brianna remarked, “They really don’t teach you exactly everything you need to know for whenever you get out of high school and you’re an adult tying to make it in life.”

Quotes from the transcripts about curriculum could go on and on. In fact, one could also find references to curriculum reform in any number of the ICSD reports or action plans. The ICSD Institutional Racism Strategic Action Plan (1994), A Retrospective Study of the Impact of Race And Class on Academic Success at Ithaca High School (2000), Close the Achievement Gap Now! Workshop Next Steps (2005), Undoing Racism Workshop Action Items (2007), and others have strongly encouraged the development of a relevant and culturally affirming curriculum. Kayla spoke to the connection between curriculum and academic achievement when she stated, “when you learn about your culture and things that have to do with you then you’re much more interested.”

Afrocentric reforms hit a zenith in the mid-1990s on a fiercely contested intellectual battleground. Many viewed the infusion of multicultural and Afrocentric content as an incursion or an invasion. E. D. Hirsch sought to protect the traditional terrain, and his work has been widely influential in determining the depth and content of curriculum reform. Hirsch's (1987) national bestseller *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* continues to be the unofficial blueprint for various state curriculum committees across the country. Hirsch (1987) states that "[t]he decline of American literacy and the fragmentation of the American school curriculum have been chiefly caused by the ever growing dominance of romantic formalism in educational theory" (p. 110).

To rectify—and renounce—the incursions of multicultural curriculum, Hirsch's book includes a list of 5,000 essential names, phrases, dates, and concepts. For Hirsch, the 5,000 items best capture American cultural literacy. And while he also cautions that this should not serve as the definitive list, the hegemonic ripples should be obvious. Absent are such names as Rosa Parks, Denmark Vessey, Combahee River Collective, the Niagara Movement, David Walker, and much more. This quick list of omitted examples is offered only to frame a reference point. Thus, when Hirsch states that his book identifies what every American needs to know—for whom and to whom does he speak?

Arthur Schlesinger, in *The Disuniting of America* (1998), argues similarly to Hirsch. Schlesinger contends that the increased diversity of the American populace carries the potential to destroy the republic or, as he states, "give way to the Tower of Babel" (p. 17). Moreover, Schlesinger sees the Afrocentric curriculum movement as nothing more than wounded reaction. He writes,

There is nothing more natural than for black Americans, as wounded racial groups have done through history, to assert pride and claim identity and

because black wounds are so much deeper than white, to do so with tragic intensity. (Schlesinger, 1998, p. 73)

Schlesinger asserts that for America to heal itself, it needs to promote a unified, singular culture. That this unified culture is white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian, and exclusive is of no concern.

At the state level, the New York State Social Studies Review and Development Committee has previously indicated that the hegemonic nature of Eurocentric curriculum has had “a terribly damaging effect on the psyche of young people of African, Asian, Latino and Native American decent.”⁴⁴ Still, within the same document, one of its committee members—Arthur Schlesinger—comments, “The task-force report vouchsafes no proof for the assertion that a Eurocentric bias wrecks the psyches of minority children” (New York State Education Dept., 1991, p. 89). And so the practices continue.

Asante’s (1991) “The Afrocentric Idea in Education” is a good starting point for those interested in better understanding the intellectual and pedagogical approach to transforming curriculum. Asante (1991) states,

When it comes to educating African American children, the American educational system does not need a tune-up, it needs an overhaul. Black children have been maligned by this system. Black teachers have been maligned. Black history has been maligned. African has been maligned. First, some teachers can and do effectively teach African American children; secondly, if some teachers can do it, others can, too . . . By providing an African perception of reality and by placing the African American child in his or her proper historical context and setting, Afrocentricity may be just the “escape hatch” African Americans so desperately need to facilitate academic success and “steal away” from the cycle of miseducation and dislocation. (p. 197)

⁴⁴ New York State Education Dept. (1991, June 1). *One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence. The Report of the New York State Social Studies Review and Development Committee.*

Asante rightfully traces the Afrocentric curriculum movement to one of the patriarchs of black American history—Carter G. Woodson—and throughout the years, many folks have touted these same ideas. As did Asante, Subira Kifano (1996), Elaine Richardson (2000), Amy Binder (2000), and others have found that if culturally relevant reforms are done well, black students thrive. Geoffrey Giddings (2001) has summarized attempts to infuse curricula with Afrocentric content and encourages readers that “if armed with the necessary social scientific research and supported by the urgent voices of parents and community members, real and meaningful Afrocentric curriculum reform could soon be realized” (p. 480).

Within the ICSD, a policy already exists in the realm of curriculum reform. The ICSD Policy 4230 states, “Major changes in the curriculum or academic program of any school shall be made only after the Board of Education and parents of the students involved have had written notification of the proposed changes, the reasons for such changes, and the alternatives available” (ICSD Policy 4230, 1974, June 12).

It is essential to note that most curriculum plans in the ICSD already require that antibias components be specifically addressed. Unfortunately, there are frequent reductions and dilutions between the paper and practice. The analysis and content theorized at the planning level only sporadically becomes part of the classroom practice. In other words, a significant part of the curriculum is pedagogy. It is not only what we teach, it is how we teach. To move the policy toward action will require teachers, department chairs, and directors to be much more intentional in their designs. Debates, challenges, passive resistance, and active resistance are sure to follow. However, in order to best educate all students, *major changes in the curriculum* are needed.

Tracking/Ability Grouping

Policy Initiative: *Detrack at least one core subject.*

There was only one question to which, when asked of all participants, each gave the same answer. The question: “Where do you see yourself in five years?” The answer: “college.” The disheartening reality: “not likely.” While all understood the importance of college education in the information economy, only half of participants were enrolled in a complete college-bound track. Despite the uniformity of response, ability grouping and tracking will help ensure that some interviewees never attend college.

Tom Loveless (1999) defines tracking as “the practice of grouping students into classes by ability and organizing curriculum by its level of difficulty” (p. 1). While there is some disagreement, most scholars contend that the practice came into use at “a time when growing numbers of immigrant children were enrolling in public schools” and “was adopted as a legitimate means of sorting out those students who were viewed as having limited preparation or capacity for schooling from native children” (Wheelock, 1992, p. 8). Beyond immigration, the rise of IQ tests during WWI (Ansalone 2000; Gould, 1996) and the Eugenics movement (Black, 2003; Harding, 1993) are equally important influences on tracking as an educational practice. In other words, an argument can be made that war, xenophobia, and racism are the theoretical origins of this widely used educational practices.

It should be no shock, then, that a number of scholars see tracking “as a vital part of how schools reproduce inequality, a structural arrangement through which individuals come to accept their own socioeconomic positions as inevitable and natural” (Rubin, 2006, p. 5). In fact, even those who support the practice as an efficient and effective educational policy acknowledge that race and class inequality exists within tracked systems. Loveless (1999) writes,

Was tracking used by some to further bigotry and intolerance? Yes, regrettably it was. Like other educational activities that make distinctions among students—awarding letter grades, meting out discipline, promoting and retaining students—tracking has been used both fairly and unfairly. But racism, ethnocentrism, and class bias were only part, not the whole of tracking’s history. (p. 34)

The ethnocentric and class bias of tracking’s history may have been easier to reject if the practice had not experienced rejuvenation during the era of school desegregation. Deeever (1991) writes, “If it were not possible to keep the black and white students separated in different school buildings, then a way must be developed to keep them in relatively separate classrooms” (p. 17). Again, disagreements may exist about the intent, but there is no denying the effects. Tracking disproportionately and negatively impacts black and poor students.

Academically, Jeanie Oakes (1986) contends that most teachers hold onto a belief that tracking promotes overall student achievement, addresses individual needs, prevents a damaged self-concept of less-capable students, allows for accurate placement, and, ultimately, makes teaching easier. As a result, “[w]hen prompted as to why they believed tracking was supported in their schools the teachers reported almost unanimously that tracking was, first and foremost, an organizational device that enabled an effective means to manage the classroom” (Ansalone & Biafora, 2004, p. 253).

Despite teacher assumptions, students are often hyperaware of tracking’s interconnectedness to race and class. Rubin and Noguera (2004) write,

Students in many of the schools in which we conducted research and observed were aware of the racial and socioeconomic aspects of tracking. When asked about detracking as opposed to tracking, students from all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds expressed the view that detracking seemed to be a more fair way to organize students for learning. Many students noted that tracking separated students by race, and that students who were put in lower tracks had fewer opportunities available to them. (p. 96)

It is this type of awareness that is present in the interview transcripts for this research project. During her interview, Kayla stated, “It’s kind of depressing because I’m in all honors—and that obviously means that like a lot of black students aren’t.” In talking about her AP classes, Jada said, “the AP classes tend to have a lot more kids who are financial well off—or at least their families are . . . kids in regents tend to be a little bit more mixed because it’s a bigger population.” And Isaiah tells the following story:

Like there’s one time where I got in trouble and the teacher—she thought that I was just some like some regular kid who did bad in school and everything. And then she found out that I was in all like honors classes and I had like straight A’s. She was surprised and changed her whole mindset.

In Ithaca, the reality is that even though black students make up 10–12% of the student body, they make up less than 3% of all students enrolled in AP courses (AERC, 2006, p. 40). Or, as Jada stated, “Well, I’m taking three classes. I’m taking AP English and I’m the only one. AP chemistry and I’m the only one. And AP French and I’m only one.” Tracking serves as in-school segregation—particularly in high-functioning, racially integrated schools. Noguera and Cohen (2004) argue, “In such communities minority students are more likely to be tracked into remedial courses or special education, to be suspended or expelled, or to be excluded from honors and gifted classrooms. Enrollment numbers give the impression that schools are integrated, but closer scrutiny reveals they are segregated within” (p. 18).

In Ithaca, class and racial isolation were talked about as concerns over nearly forty years ago when tracking was suggested as a plan to assist “disadvantaged” children. The *Ithaca Journal* reported the recommendation for academic tracks in the following manner:

The most significant part of the program, educationally, would be providing special “tracks” for the educationally disadvantaged and in hiring a coordinator-counselor to coordinate community efforts to help these children, Mason said. “Tracking” in education is an arrangement where special

experiences, teachers, or programs are provided to fill a specific pupil ability or need. Special tracks already are provided for superior and exceptional pupils. This tracking would not be one in which disadvantaged pupils would be isolated, but one in which they would be given special class assistance and provided with extra personal help, he explained. A tracking program of the enrichment type could be scheduled from kindergarten through the 12th grade, he said. (Clay, 1965)

Unfortunately, and by 1969, it appears that isolation was one of the clear effects. According to the summer research report *Black People and the Ithaca City School District*, tracking did not operate as ICSD Superintendent Mason proclaimed. The 1969 report states, “of those seventeen Black students who graduated from Ithaca High School for the year 1968–69, only two students were taking courses above level three [college prep]” (p. 43). During a 1991 radio segment on WHCU, it was questioned why black students were being encouraged to take creative cooking and woodshop. Furthermore, the 1997 report from the Tompkins County Future Search Conference on Racism claimed a key trend in local schools is that “tracking that fails to meet individual student needs” (n.p.).

The continued practice of tracking in Ithaca schools has opponents. The *Final Report: Race and Education at Ithaca High School* found staff support for detracking. According to the authors, “There were a total of twenty six (26) responses to the question focusing on the internal structure of the school. The two ideas with the most responses were: eliminate tracking (7) and increasing the use of different teaching approaches with more relevant instruction (7)” (Barr & Turner, 1998, p. 4).

There is sufficient research, both locally and nationally, that demonstrates strong racial imbalances in academic tracks. Detracking, if done effectively, has the potential to greatly ease black students’ feelings of isolation, and there is a large body of scholarship that promotes the possible benefits of detracking as an equity reform (Cooper, 1999; Fine, Anand, Jordan, & Sherman, 1998; Rubin & Noguera, 2004; Rubin, 2006; Yonezawa & Jones, 2006). However, the clearest reason to detrack is the

overall positive effects on the achievement of all students. For example, when detracking was last attempted in Ithaca, it was claimed that “twice as many students scored between 95 and 100 as when physics classes were tracked” (Berger, 1995, p. 46).

There is no doubt that efforts to detrack will face widespread resistance. Alfie Kohn (1998) argues that “[u]nlike the more blatantly racist parents of an earlier generation, who resisted school desegregation policies because they did not want their children in schools with ‘colored’ children, [today’s] influential parents are more subtle and savvy in their resistance to detracking efforts that lead to desegregation within schools” (para. 50). Kohn (1998) proceeds to say that often the rationales used for opposition are the equivalent of racial code: lack of motivation, lack of commitment, behavioral issues.

If tracking has the potential to increase achievement, why is the practice so well guarded? Maureen Hallinan (2004) offers the following:

What explains the resilience of tracking? For one thing, teaching in a detracked school is far more difficult than in a tracked school . . . Moreover, detracking necessitates reallocating teachers and administrators, modifying the curriculum, and providing professional training. Schools may find these changes prohibitive for budgetary or logistical reasons. Finally, parents of high-ability students tend to prefer rigorous, homogenous classes, while other parents are unconvinced that heterogeneous classes will benefit their children. (pp. 75–76)

Mostly, educational tracking is so guarded because it is “a highly normative and political endeavor that confronts deeply held cultural beliefs, ideologies, and fiercely protected arrangements of material and political advantage in local communities” (Oakes & Wells, 1997, p. 507). In other words, tracking taps into many people’s conception of privilege and meritocracy.

During Ithaca’s previous attempt to detrack, an article in the *CQ Researcher* (1996) warned, “it is one thing to bemoan inequity, however, and another to design a

public school that transcends it” (Is the Democratic Dream, para. 12). It is for this reason that many who advocate detracking talk less about the day-to-day operations and more about cultural shifts in school/community operations. Robert Cooper (1999) writes, “Research on detracking seems to indicate that school change is affected by issues of race and social class and thus, a culture of detracking is more important than particular alternatives or implementation strategies” (p. 262).

In some ways, the policy for detracking in Ithaca already exists. One way to interpret the Multicultural/Multiethnic Education Policy is to eliminate in-school segregation. The ICSD BoE holds diversity to be “a strength that enriches society.” Moreover, “Multicultural education fosters an awareness and understanding of diverse perspectives and culturally diverse learning and problem solving processes. It is designed to foster empathy, human caring, and a commitment to social justice and democratic change” (ICSD Policy 4350, 1999, February 23). Beyond an increase in educational outcomes, it would appear that detracking would help the ICSD to actualize Policy 4350. As Rubin (2006) states, “Detracking, when carefully implemented, involves a set of institutional, instructional, and belief changes that provide outstanding educational opportunities for all students” (p. 12). If Ithaca schools want to fundamentally challenge the inequality present in their classrooms, detracking at least one core subject is a prerequisite.

Areas of Future Research

Given my personal and professional experiences, there were a number of results I expected to find. I expected students to discuss the quality of teachers (both those they liked, and those they did not) as well as the cultural responsiveness (or lack thereof) of teachers. I expected to hear about the role of a culturally relevant curriculum. I expected to hear about notions of isolation—especially for those students

who found themselves segregated by highest levels of tracking and ability-grouping. I expected to hear stories of low—or no—expectations, and I expected to hear stories about teachers who have been inspirational.

I did not expect to hear pronounced gendered differences. In fact, while there are some implicit feminist tenets throughout the design, the lack of intentional and overt gendered considerations is a flaw of this project. I was aware that differences were present but underestimated the pronouncements. Differences regarding violence, friends, classroom expectations, and other schooling matters warrant further research. Discipline data and test scores offer some clues, but very little of the available data are disaggregated by multiple factors beyond race/class. Plainly stated, additional research projects and statistical analysis with a focus that explores the intersectionality of race, class, and gender are needed.

I was also unprepared for students' contradictory delineations of race and racism. There are many examples of racism found throughout the transcripts. Students told stories of being called racial epithets, the existence of racist graffiti, and of racialized violence. Yet, when asked, "Do you think there is racism in your school?," responses were conflicting. One interviewee said yes and then no in the response, "I do because there has been like evidence of it. But I honestly think that if our school was racist that I'd be scared to go to school and I'm not . . . so I don't think we have race issues in our school." In nearly all interviews, students expressed a clear discomfort, unease, and uncertainty about naming racism or locating racism in their school. Responses included, "I don't really want to call it a race issue but it sort of feels that way," and "Heck yeah. I know there is somewhere." Or, "Maybe, I think it's prejudice." But the most common was summed up by one student who stated, "I can't really call it racism anymore."

In the summer of 2002, *Rethinking Schools* published a letter from fifth-grader Michelle Williams to the textbook editors of Harcourt Brace and Company. Michelle wrote, “I am 11 years old and I like to read and write. When I am reading I notice every little word and in your social studies book, I realize that the word ‘racism’ is not in your textbook.” The response from Donald P. Lankiewicz, Harcourt School Publishers’ vice president and editor-in-chief, may provide some understanding of why interviewees were unable or unwilling to name racism. In his reply to Michelle’s letter, Donald Lankiewicz writes,

Dear Michelle . . . While the word “racism” does not appear, the subject of unfair treatment of people because of their race is addressed on page 467 when segregation is explained. The topic is further explained in relation to the prejudice experienced by Asian, Mexican and European immigrants on pages 495–498. There is also a discussion of civil rights on pages 624–625 that talks about how people of all races should have equal job opportunities and equal rights under the law. So even though the word “racism” is not used in the text, the concept is addressed. I’m sure you will agree that is the most important thing. (*Rethinking Schools*, Summer 2002, p. 12)

Not only is there a direct silencing of the word *racism*, one must get through 450+ pages before “the unfair treatment of people because of their race is addressed.”

At the moment, I am unable to find other explanations for why students tell stories of being called racial epithets, threats of lynching, pro-Nazi and pro-Klu Klux Klan graffiti, low/no expectations, unequal treatment, racialized violence, and any number of racist manifestations; but why almost no interviewees responded that racism was present in their schools. It is possible that silencing the discussion around racism has been exacerbated by the promotion of colorblindness and promotions of supposed racial transcendence. Where as DuBois stated that the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line, the 21st century is supposedly bearing witness to the declining significance of race. Even while social, economic, and political cues point to an increasing apartheid-esque America (Smiley, 2006), society is less likely to

discuss its racialized origin. Particularly in U.S. schools, we have become what Mica Pollock (2004) calls *colormute*.

The stark reality is that qualitative and quantitative data indicate that we have not yet arrived at a place where race is inconsequential to one's life/educational opportunities. Sizable differences in incarceration rates, poverty rates, unemployment rates, graduation rates, life expectancy, and other indices all reflect a real and concrete racial reality (U.S. Census, The American Community—Blacks, 2004). In fact, it bears reiterating: the ICSD BoE goal is *to eliminate race, class and ability as predictors of academic success*. We have not yet arrived. Still, interviewees could not define racism, nor were they willing/able to identify it. This phenomenon demonstrates a significant disconnect and the ramifications of a colorblind or supposed post-racial ideology may directly impact academic achievement. Talk of the post-racial does very little to get U.S. society to a position of post-racism. Speculative rationales aside, it is clear that more research is needed in this area.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored racial inequalities in a top-rated school district by utilizing interviews with black students as a means to frame policy recommendations. There were certainly differences found in the students' experiences. However, the commonalities that emerged from the interview transcripts proved to be the most instructive. The participants called for diversifying the faculty, requested that teachers possess cultural competence, asked for curricular relevancy, and strongly recommended disciplinary reforms. There was also a general sense that the district could—and should—do more to promote a climate of comfortableness and cohesion.

From these voices, specific policy initiatives were formed by centering the experiences of black students who participated in this study. The recommended policies were outlined in Chapter 7 and include creating dynamic educational spaces, increasing staff training and development, recruiting and retaining a racially and ethnically diverse faculty, reforming and expanding the curriculum, utilizing alternative assessments, revamping disciplinary practices, as well as beginning the process toward detracking. The Aspen Institute's commission report—Beyond NCLB (2007)—recommended that while implementing each of their 75 recommendations would have a positive effect, the full impact would be realized only if all recommendations were “considered as a whole” (p. 14). The seven policy initiatives above should be viewed similarly. Each has the potential to positively influence the academic achievement of black students, but it is only when substantial shifts—or a slate of reforms—are earnestly enacted that transformative results will emerge.

The Ithaca City School District—and districts with similar characteristics and histories—would be wise to consider these policy recommendations carefully. If we

are to seriously address and work to eliminate gross racial disparities in educational outcomes and experiences, particularly in university towns, districts will have to undergo radical reforms. Schools and school districts will have to change their cultures, pedagogies and practices. This will include a dramatic shift in resources and budget allocations. Debate and resistance are sure to follow.

This is not to deny the role and responsibilities of students, families, or communities. There are no doubt a host of policy recommendations outside of school walls that are necessary. Families and students could always do more. Additionally, there are an equal number of reforms at the elementary and intermediate levels that would greatly benefit black students. Even while other forces are at play, high schools cannot wait for change to occur around them.

One hypothesis that guided the early years of this research was the naïve belief that no one had dug deep enough: That no one had pushed through the frustration, the anger, the confusion, or the struggle to solve the education problem. That the difficulty existed because no one had yet solved the riddle. In order to remedy this, I read for possible answers. I read books on black education. I read Carter G. Woodson. I read W. E. B DuBois. I read David Walker, Mary Bethune-Cookmen, Janice Hale, Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, Sean Ginwright, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and others.

I read books on educational theory, democracy, and oppression. I read John Dewey, Pierre Bourdieu, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Joel Spring, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, and some Jürgen Habermas. I read books on Afrocentric epistemologies. I read Molefi Asante, Cheik Anta Diop, CT Keto, Patricia Hill Collins, and others. I read local historians—Carol Kammen, Field Horne, Corinne Galvin, Claudia Montague, William “Daddy” George, Frank Boynton, and scores of journalists.

In short, I read and read. Not all were good. Mary Lefkowitz (1996) and Clarence Walker (2001) were intellectually insulting. Others, however, were exceptional. James Anderson (1988) and William Watkins (2001) have fundamentally influenced my perspective regarding America's education of black students. Paulo Freire (1970/2000) continues to influence my thinking on the role, purpose, and function of schooling. But in the constant push to read—to read books, articles, newspapers, and blogs—in the push to watch films and documentaries—in the push to talk with elders—the quest was driven by the belief that the answer must be out there. Contrary to *Afrocentricity's* warning that “knowledge does not rest in an eternal pool somewhere waiting” (Akinyela, 1995, p. 26), I believed that I could locate the answers if I simply read more and researched with more depth.

When I could not find the answers in the national literature, I then sought answers from black students. When I could not find answers from black students, I sought answers in the local scholarship. The more I read and the more I researched, the more I began to see interesting patterns. There exists a plethora of suggested answers and, throughout the national and local history, the best recommendations are repeated often. Rather than affirming my research findings, this repetition began to cripple my research. The possibility of recycling the same policy recommendations seemed academically disingenuous.

During the 1879 commencement ceremony for the relatively young Ithaca High School, Ithaca's Board of Education President addressed the students, parents, and community members. It was the commencement ceremony for Miss Jessie A. Johnson and her classmates. Miss Johnson's class was the first to complete the public school's four-year curriculum, and she was one of the year's twelve graduates. Miss Jessie A. Johnson, the daughter of George and Mary Johnson, was also the first black student to graduate from Ithaca's public high school—receiving her degree in the

scientific course. It is quite possible, even likely, that Miss Jessie Johnson and her family were somewhere in the audience. Between the essay readings, orchestra selections, and congratulatory remarks, the Johnson family would have looked on as Board President E. S. Esty rose and spoke the following:

Do not receive these diplomas merely as certificates of acquirements in success already achieved, but rather regard them as the keys which shall unlock for you the doors of the colleges and universities. Regard these as but the stepping stones by means of which you may go up higher. *Always room at the top* said Daniel Webster. Although the lower and middle ranks jostle each other in competition, and struggle for position and support, how serenely the comparatively few who attain eminence stand, both in life and history. [emphasis added]⁴⁵

A century later, an Ithaca High School diploma still unlocks the doors of the nation's best colleges and universities. However, over a century later, we still continue to see the lower and middle ranks struggle for position and support. Esty's early influence on the formation of Ithaca schools helped to create "Cornell's Largest Fitting School" and established Ithaca High School as one of the best secondary schools in the nation. Regrettably, far too many have yet to ask, why is there *always room at the top*?

What I have come to realize is that we already know what to do. We have known what to do. If we listen to students and families, if we review the history, and if we critically read the stated policies, we have all of the ideas that would make the difference. This problem exists not because we lack the brain power to discover answers or the resources to create solutions. What we lack is a collective willingness to match word and deed. We have not yet put into practice that which Ithaca's own have put onto paper. We come close. People have fought, organized, and collaborated. Sometimes we even diligently try. But ultimately we allow the transformation to fail.

We can identify a host of potential factors. Critical race theorists identify *whiteness as property* (Harris, 1999), *interest convergence* (Bell, 1980), *empathic*

⁴⁵ "Ithaca High School. Fourth Annual Commencement." (1879, June 14). *Ithaca Journal*, p. 4.

fallacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and our lack of *socio-historic comprehension* (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005) as potential factors. Or the failure of transformation could easily be the result of greed, fatigue, passivity, ignorance, apathy, and/or malice.

In the final analysis, it is not the educational policies that need to be addressed but rather our larger community politics. All of the recommendations have been made previously. Each has had strong advocates—locally and nationally. There is no shortage of supporting rationales, policy proposals, research reports, or action plans. The reality is that all of the policy initiatives have been decidedly unimplemented. As a result, and until the Ithaca community decides that our disproportionate educational outcomes are no longer desirable, black and poor students will continue to have a roughly 50/50 chance of graduating from one of the best school systems in the United States.

APPENDIX 1:
SELECTIONS FROM ICSD EQUITY REPORT CARD

Glossary of Terms

African American/Latino/Native American (AA_Lat_NA): The larger category we used to display data about students of color who are non-Asian. While these students have different cultures and different experiences of school, we have grouped them, in part, to have a large enough group of students so that data can be displayed meaningfully. Were we to separate these groups, the data would have to be suppressed in many areas of participation or achievement.

Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL): The only measure of students' economic status available is their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program (FRPL). Applications for this income-based service are mailed to students' homes. Students in the category designated as FRPL have applied and qualified for the service. Not all families who are entitled to the service take advantage of it; therefore, poverty is somewhat underreported.

Language About Race: You will notice that this report card deviates from the prescribed language of federal racial/ethnic guidelines in some ways but not in others. We grouped Latino/African American/Native American students in one group in order to remain consistent with the mission of the Village at Ithaca. In addition, while we know there are wide variations in the way Asian Americans experience school in our district, we were not able to isolate the participation and success of even Southeast Asian children from East Asian children because currently students do not register by country of origin or more specific geographic region. These categories represent an area in which we would appreciate feedback.

Race: Students register for school in Ithaca, as in all districts, using racial categories prescribed by the federal government. The race the family chooses is the race associated with that student. Currently, families have no option to choose multiple races. This means that biracial or multiracial families must choose what race, from the federal categories, to associate with their child.

Residence/Rural: For this report card we considered rural students to be those whose residence was outside the Town or City of Ithaca and the Village or Town of Lansing. By this definition 30% of ICSD students are rural. It should be noted that this is a very rough division. For instance, it designates Varna and the Ellis Hollow neighborhood as rural, and the entire Buttermilk Falls State Park as non-rural.

Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, pp. 12–15.

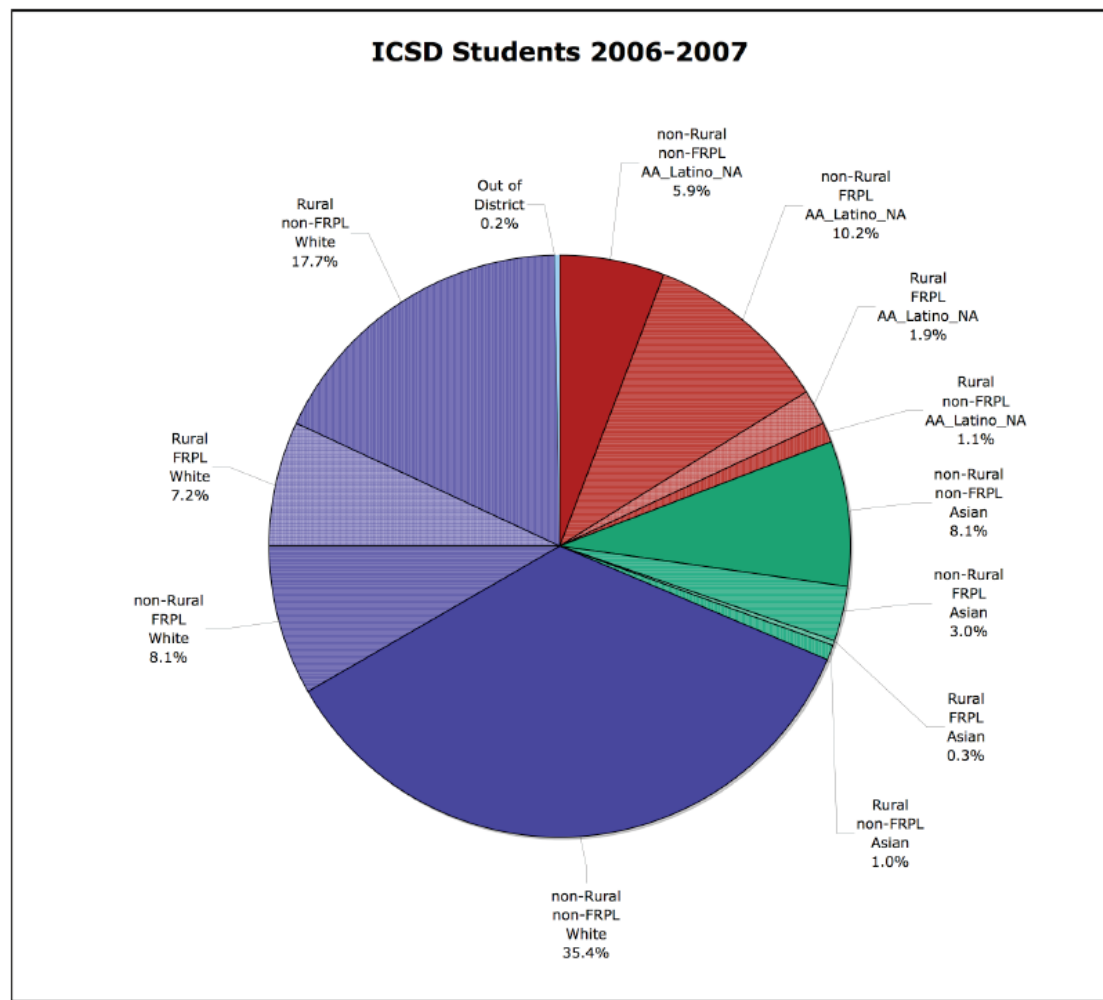


Figure A.1.1: ICSD Student Demographics. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 21.

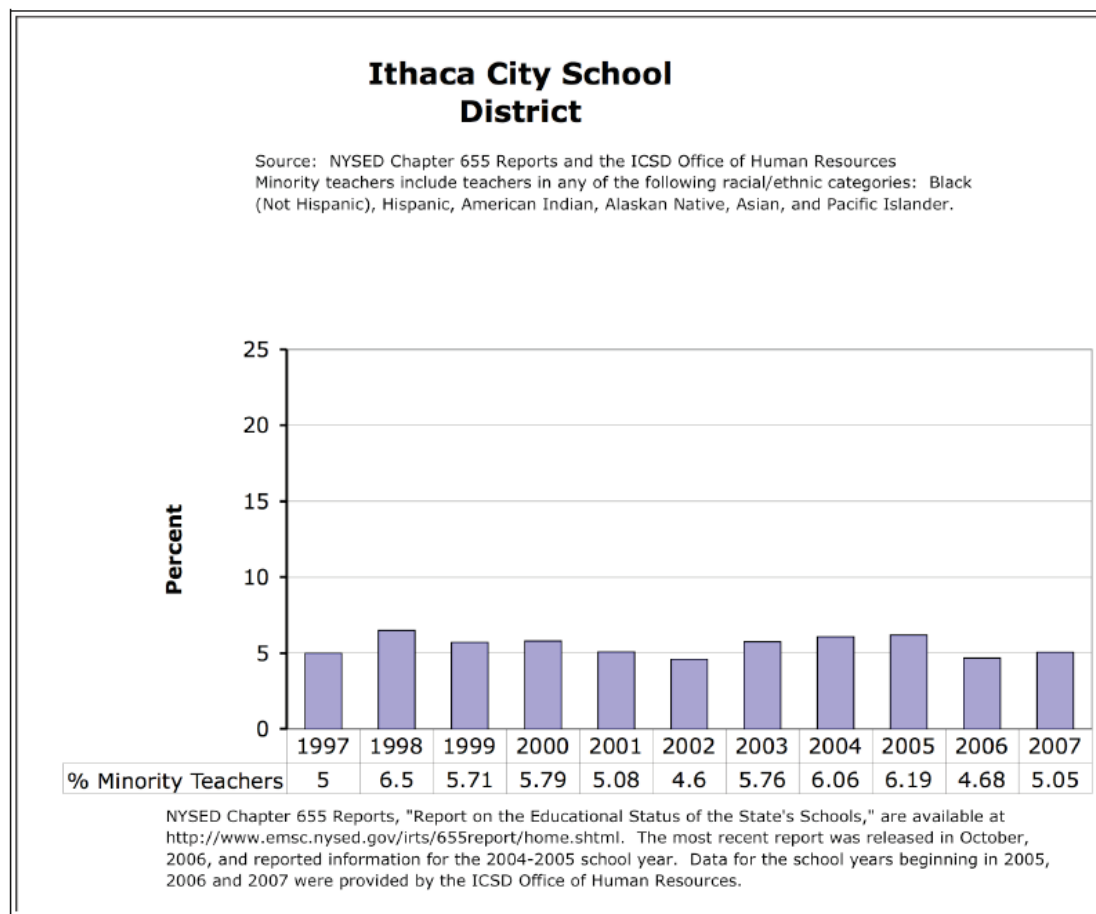


Figure A.1.2: ICSD Staff Demographics. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 23.

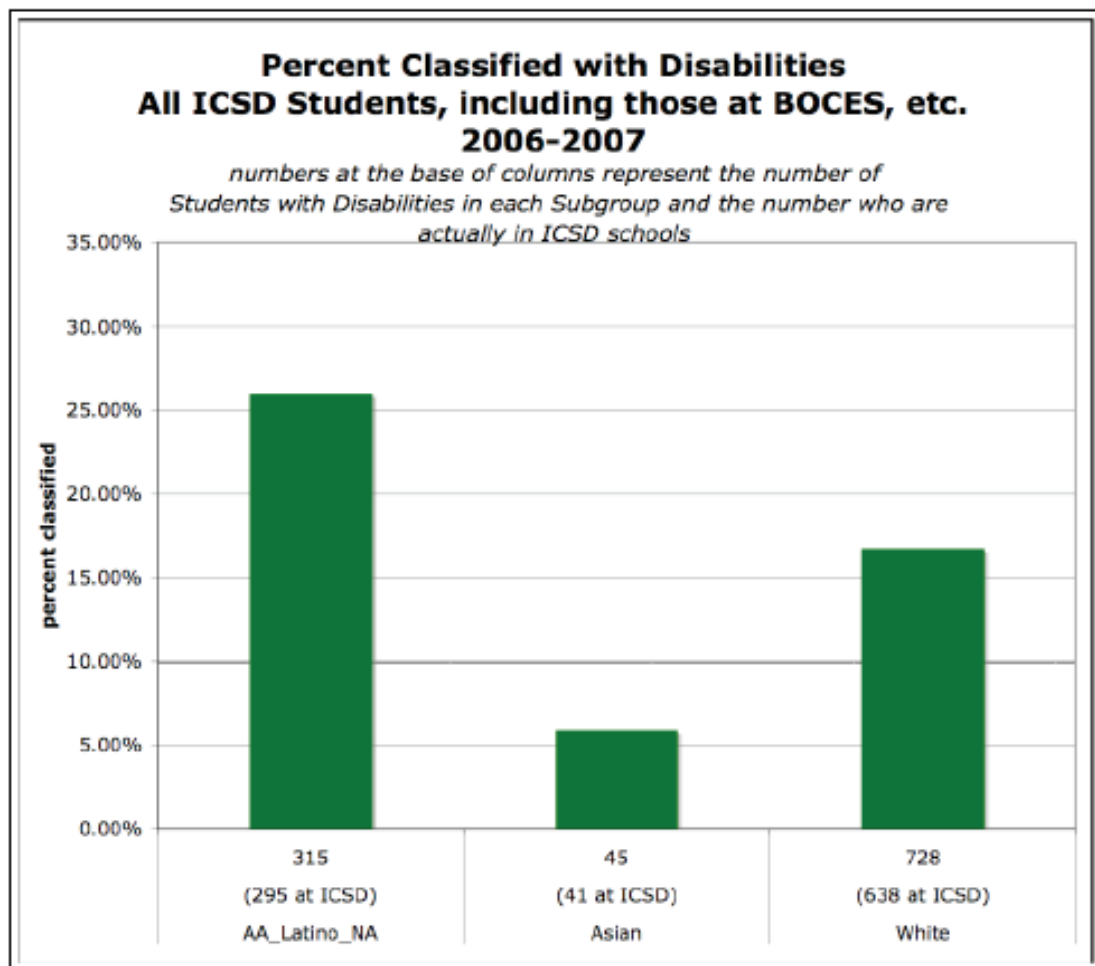


Figure A.1.3: ICSD Special Education Classification. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 27.

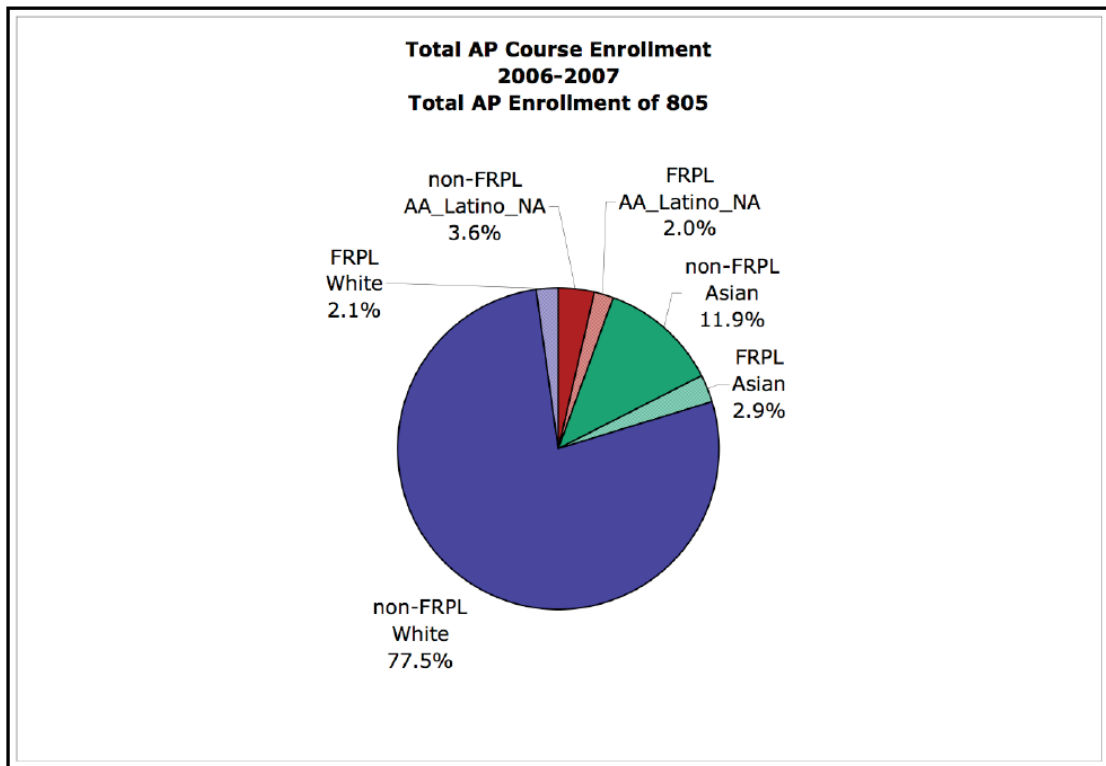


Figure A.1.4: ICSD Advanced Placement (AP) Enrollment. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 29.

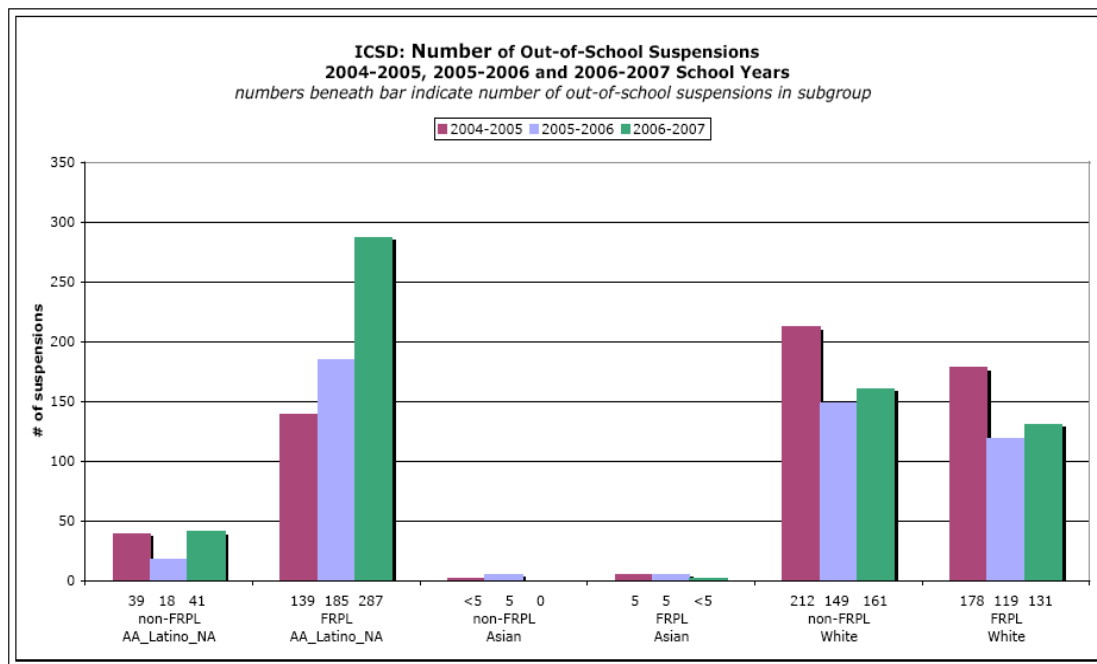


Figure A.1.5: ICSD Out-of-School Suspensions. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 31.

3-8 English Language Arts Performance Index: Overall									
	All FRPL			All Non-FRPL			All Students		
	2006	2007	Change	2006	2007	Change	2006	2007	Change
AA/Latino/NA	126	134	8	173	176	3	144	148	4
Asian	169	169	0	195	191	-4	190	187	-3
White	129	152	23	183	187	4	172	180	8
All Races	130	145	15	183	186	3	168	174	6
3-8 Mathematics Performance Index: Overall									
	All FRPL			All Non-FRPL			All Students		
	2006	2007	Change	2006	2007	Change	2006	2007	Change
AA/Latino/NA	116	126	10	168	168	0	136	141	5
Asian	182	155	-27	194	192	-2	191	184	-7
White	137	154	17	181	185	4	172	179	7
All Races	131	142	11	181	185	4	167	172	5

Figure A.1.6: ICSD 3rd and 8th Grade Language Arts and Mathematics Test Scores. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 42.

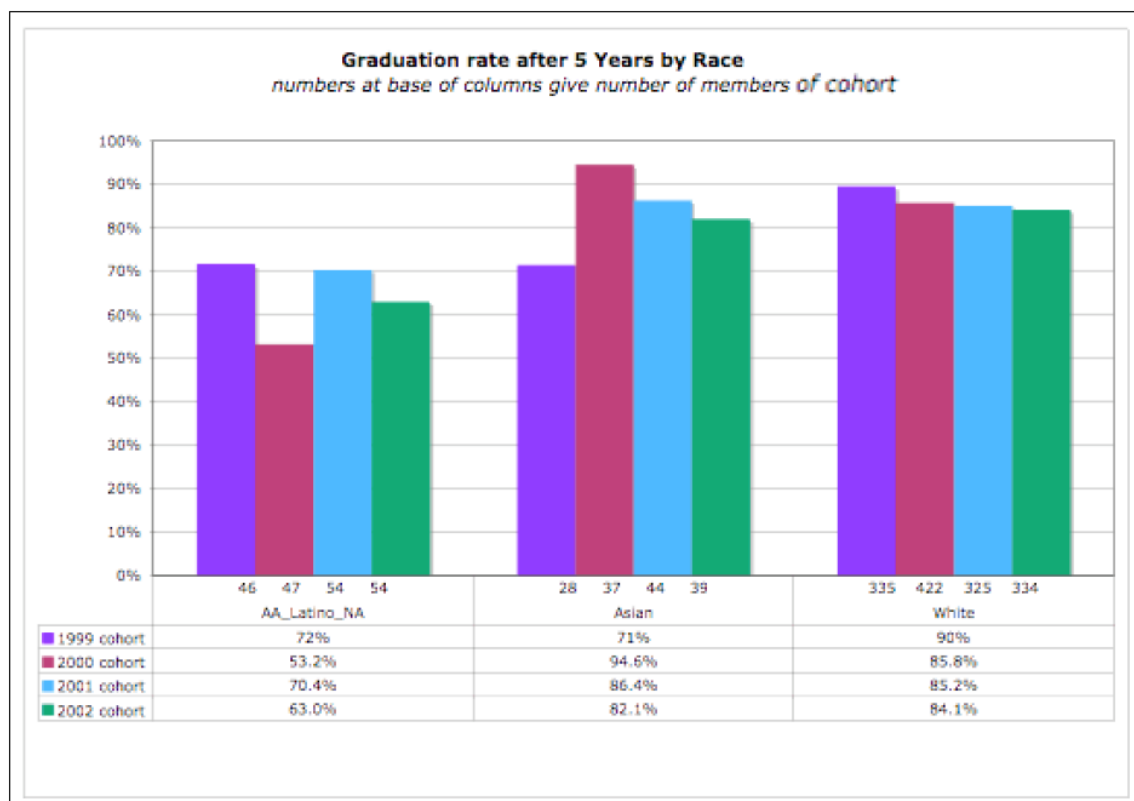


Figure A.1.7: ICSD Graduation Rates. Source: Ithaca City School District. (2008). Second Annual Equity Report Card: Holding Ourselves Accountable. Ithaca, NY: Ithaca City School District and Village at Ithaca, p. 47.

APPENDIX 2:
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Your child is invited to be in a research study about the experiences of African American and Black students in public high schools. Your child has been selected as a possible participant because your child is in the age range I am interested in studying. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to participate in this study.

The study: The purpose of this study is to gather information on the experiences of African American and Black students in U.S. public high schools. It is designed to explore the meaning and impact of formal education in their lives. If you agree to allow your child to participate, your child will be asked to sit for a conversational interview. Your child will be asked to share their thoughts and experiences about schools and education. The interview will take approximately 1 hour to complete.

Risks and benefits: This program comes with minimal risk to the individuals involved. The only risk may be that the discussion of educational experiences is considered sensitive material. The possible benefits of this research are the knowledge that the data collected will contribute to the field of education and a \$20 gift card.

Confidentiality: The records of this study are strictly confidential. The name of the student will not be identified at any time. If an interview is audio recorded, all audio recordings will be completely erased immediately after transcription. Study participant's names will not appear on any documents with the exception of this form. Consent forms will be kept securely along with results for 7 years after completion of this study.

Voluntary nature of participation: Your decision to let your child participate in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Cornell University or with your child's school. You may withdraw your child from the study at any time if you choose to do so. Furthermore, your child may also discontinue participation at any time. All the questions involved in this study are voluntary. Your child is not required to answer any questions he or she may not feel comfortable answering. Again, this study is strictly voluntary. There is absolutely no penalty for not participating in this study.

The researcher conducting this study is Sean Eversley-Bradwell. You may reach him at 273-6587, or swe5@cornell.edu. Please feel free to ask any questions you have now, or at any point in the future. In addition, if you have any questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research subject, you may contact the Cornell University Committee on Human Subjects (UCHS) at 255-5138, or you may access their website at <http://www.osp.cornell.edu/Compliance/UCHS/homepageUCHS.htm>.

Child's
name:

Signature of Parent/Caregiver:

Date:

Please sign below if you are willing to have your child's interview recorded on audiotape. Your child may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview audio recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded on audiotape:

Signature of Parent/Caregiver:

Date:

APPENDIX 3:
CHILD ASSENT FORM

I am completing a study to try to learn about what it is like to be a student in high school. I am asking you to help because your thoughts and your perspective are important.

If you agree to be in my study, I will ask you questions about your experiences as a student. For example, I will ask you questions that include what you like about school, what should be the purpose of homework and what makes a good teacher. The conversational interview will take approximately 1-hour. If you agree to audio recording your interview, the tape will be erased immediately after a transcript has been typed. Your name will never appear on any other documents. For your participate in the study, you will receive a \$20 gift card.

You can ask questions that you might have about this study now or at any time. Also, if you decide at any time not to finish, you may stop whenever you want. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Remember, these questions are only about what you think. Please know, there are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this form and that you would like to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, please do not sign the paper. Remember, being in the study is up to you. No one will be upset with you if you don't sign this paper or even if you change your mind later.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Please sign below if you are willing to have your interview recorded on audiotape. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview audio recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded on audiotape:

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX 4:

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions were used as reference for semistructured interviews. Each question was asked of multiple participants, but not all questions were asked of each participant. The ordering and wording for interview questions changed as dictated by the flow of the conversation.

What are some of the things you like about your school?

What are some of the things you would like to change at your school?

How would you describe yourself as a student?

What are some of the challenges you have had to face in school?

What are some of the successes you have had in school?

Do you think communities influence schools? Why/why not? How/how not?

From your perspective, how do your friends/peers feel about school/education?

Which is your favorite room in the school? Describe it for me.

Which is your least favorite room? Describe it for me.

What is your favorite class? Why?

What is your least favorite class? Why?

Pretend you are talking with the superintendent about your school. What do you think would be the most important to tell him/her?

How would you describe a good education?

How does a student know if he/she is getting a good education?

Do you believe you are getting a good education?

Describe some of the courses/skills schools should teach to prepare students for life after high school.

From your perspective, tell me what it means to be a black student in your school.

What does racism mean to you? Do you think there is racism in your school?

What is your school doing that foster success for black students?

What do you think schools should do to foster success for black students?

Teachers and schools use many ways to check if students have learned. If someone wanted to find out what you learned, how should they try to do this?

Think of a teacher that you feel is an excellent teacher. What makes this person a good teacher?

What do you think most teachers expect of their students?

What are your plans for the next five years?

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Think ahead to the future. If you plan to raise children and/or if you have younger family members, what would you like school to be like for them? How is this different/same from the way schools are now?

Is there anything you would like to add? Is there an additional comment you would like to make?

APPENDIX 5:

TIMELOOP: BLACK FOLKS AND SCHOOLING IN ITHACA, NY

This document was constructed as racial tensions emerged during the fall of 2007. As various community organizations held meetings to plot a course of action, much of the time was spent on “bringing people up to speed.” In an attempt to provide the background for the historical and cyclical nature of inequity in local schools, this timeloop was offered to the community organizations and to Ithaca City School District personnel. It is included here in the same format in which it was made available to the larger community. It is also the research that was used for the *Achieving Equity* talk delivered at the History Center in Ithaca, NY.

Equity Timeloop

Feeling compelled to deliver a forceful response to the white clergy who criticized his timing, his methods, and his involvement in a city rife with struggle, Dr. King penned his historic *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*. The letter includes some of the most-cited quotations attributed to Dr. King and a noted rebuke of white liberalism. The letter also begins a public conversation on the required steps for nonviolent direct action. According to King, the first step of any social justice action must begin with *a collection of facts*.

By most measures, Ithaca, NY, is a definitive university or college town. Like other university/college towns, it is primarily a single-industry community. Not only are three of the top four county employers in the public/private education sector, but education accounts for more than a quarter of all jobs.⁴⁶ Census data indicate that

⁴⁶ Tompkins County Area Development Website. Community Profile. Retrieved from <http://www.tcad.org/businessInfo/factsandfigures.php> on May 10, 2008. According to data compiled by the Tompkins County Area Development—an organizations whose “primary mission is to create quality private sector jobs and strengthen the local tax base”—Cornell has the most

Ithaca's population is above average in terms of the number of graduate/professional degrees earned, and one can find there the requisite number of pizza takeouts, coffeehouses, bookstores, and second-hand clothing stores.

Blake Gumprecht (2003) writes that another characteristic of college/university towns is their transient population. More than other U.S. communities, college towns have significant populations who are likely to have lived in another state within the previous five years. According to Gumprecht, the seasonal, almost natural, ebb and flow of college towns keeps them youthful, unconventional, and cosmopolitan (p. 54). What Gumprecht does not mention is that this transience—the frequent flow of people into and out of a community—easily disrupts the collective/community memory.

To be sure, there were many people in the larger Ithaca community who believed the fall 2007 rallies and protests in schools were long overdue. There were also many people in the larger Ithaca community who believed these protests were unnecessary and/or unwarranted. Some questioned the motives. Some questioned the impact. The creation of the timeloop was an attempt to answer these questions. It relies heavily on primary documents and is, quite literally, “a collection of facts.”

Timeloop and Sankofa

It would be a mistake to read this document as a linear history; or, as Dr. King (1967) writes, “the line of progress is never straight” (p. 12). Rather than the frequently used idea of a timeline, this is intentionally designed as a *timeloop*. The names and dates will change, but there is no shortage of repetition. Time, in many places, folds back on itself. This is precisely why the Adinkra word/idea of *Sankofa* offers some insights into the persistent tensions, protests, and status of educational

employees in the county at 9,480 for 2006. Ithaca College (1,525 employees), Borg Warner (1,500), and the Ithaca City School District (1,200) are the second through fourth employers, respectively.

(in)equity in Ithaca schools. Loosely translated to “go back and fetch it”—Sankofa is displayed in multiple visual symbols that all suggest moving forward while keeping an eye on the past.

In constructing the timeloop, material from Cornell’s Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, the History Center Archives, and the Ithaca City School District Archives provided key pieces of local history. The timeloop also includes references from local historians, books, theses and dissertations, photographs, grant proposals, documentaries, newspaper articles, agendas, lectures, research reports, Board of Education minutes, radio segments, yearbooks, pamphlets, student publications, editorials, letters, and more. The goal is to present as many primary documents as possible, and there are detailed endnotes for each entry located at the end of the timeloop. Despite the range of sources, there should be no doubt that the omissions are infinite. All attempts to capture history are, at best, incomplete. Yes, these selections were intentionally chosen, and this should encourage the reader to consider the sources carefully and critically.

Academic excellence, academic failure, and the paradox of resistance are the three key ideas I have come to see in constructing the timeloop. Still, it is essential that readers make their own meanings of and connections to this telling of history. It is for this reason that the timeloop is presented in its current form. The listing of dates is a pedagogical approach. The timeloop is designed to be used and read. Moreover, it is expected that the reader will explore the dates, the events, and the people. It is expected that the reader will also pay particular attention to the research notes. Explore the sources. Make additions. Fill in the gaps. Challenge the past. This summary and timeloop on the following pages are an invitation to engage Ithaca’s educational history. The essential question is *where do we go from here?*

Timeloop: Black Folks and Schooling in Ithaca, NY

- 1779** Sullivan's Campaign destroys the Tutelo Village at Coregonal. Harry Melone writes, "With sword and flame the land was cleared of its former owners."¹
- 1788** Richard Loomis is brought to Tompkins County as "human chattel."² Slavery marks the first record of black folks in Ithaca.
- 1796** First record of schooling. Kurtz writes, "As early as 1796 that portion of the town of Ulysses which became Ithaca was represented in the management of the existing schools by Robert McDowell, Benjamin Pelton and William Van Orman—early settlers—as is shown by the town records."³
- 1807** First school is built in Ithaca. Jane Dieckmann writes, "The first school in Ithaca, District School No. 16, was built on the corner of Seneca and Cayuga streets, site of the DeWitt Building and a corner that has always had school buildings on it."⁴
- 1822** Ithacans work to found a college. Writing in 1822, Philip Stansbury states, "Ithaca will be the place wherein all those minor academies and institutions, at present spread over the fertile and well inhabited countries beyond the first of the parallel lakes to Erie, will be centred into one great flourishing temple of science." Proposal is effectively denied.⁵
- 1823** Ithaca Academy is formed to provide secondary education. It is argued that the failed attempt for a college provides the seed money for the Academy building.⁶
- 1833** St. James A.M.E. Zion Church is founded. The church website states, "Built in 1833, St. James AME Zion is believed to be the oldest church structure in Ithaca and one of the first of the AME Zion churches in the country. An Underground Railroad station, St. James is located in a community that was an important transfer point for fugitive slaves en route to Canada. Many of these slaves, impressed by the support of the local community, decided to stay in Ithaca and constructed homes in the area surrounding St. James."⁷
- 1833** On November 13, 1833, the Trustees Book of Record for Public School District No. 16 records a meeting "for the purpose of making provisions for the school about to be opened in the new school house." In outlining the roles of the principal and teachers, the book also states that students must be residents of the district "unless by special permission, in writing, signed by a majority of the trustees."⁸

- 1839** Peter Wheeler publishes an autobiography, *Chains and Freedom: Or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler, a Colored Man Yet Living. A Slave in Chains, a Sailor on the Deep, and a Sinner at the Cross*. Among other experiences, Wheeler details his life of enslavement in Tompkins County.⁹



Courtesy of the History Center: Ithaca, NY

Illustration A.5.1: Frederick Webb and Oxen (n.d.)

- 1841** The New York Colored American references “a flourishing school” for black children in Ithaca.¹⁰
- 1851** New York State Superintendent’s Report indicates monies earmarked for “colored” education in Ithaca.¹¹
- 1863** Between December 3, 1863 and February 18, 1864, twenty-six black men from Ithaca enlisted in the 26th Regiment of the United States Colored Infantry. According to county historian Carol Kammen, “In late 1863, New York agreed to allow African-American men to enlist in the United States Colored Infantry. Black soldiers did not receive a bounty and were paid less

than white soldiers . . . But they were counted toward New York state's quota of men enlisted in the Civil War. In less than 60 days, 2,300 men—about 25 percent of the African-American male population between ages 18 and 45—signed up.”¹²

- 1865** Cornell University is founded. In an 1868 letter to A. D. White, Ezra Cornell states, “I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study.”¹³
- 1872** Cornell University becomes one of the first eastern universities to admit women and men. Charlotte Conable writes, “The admission of women to Cornell University is closely linked, according to legend, to the phrasing of the university motto.”¹⁴
- 1874** Draft of letter from Andrew Dickson White to C. H. McCormick, September 5, 1874, “In answer to your letter first received, I would say that we have no colored students at the University at present but shall be very glad to receive any who are prepared to enter. Although there is no certainty, the entrance of any such students here during the present year, they may come and if even one offered himself and passed the examinations, we should receive him even if all our five hundred white students were to ask for dismissal on that account.”¹⁵
- 1874** On May 11, 1874, the New York State legislature passed a bill entitled, “An act to secure to children the benefits of elementary education.” The bill required municipalities to offer elementary education and was designed to address the growing concerns of child labor. With little authority for enforcement and even less authority to require public expense, the act moves closer toward a system of free (tax-supported), compulsory education for all New York state residents.¹⁶ It is important to note this year also marks the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Stuart & Others v. Kalamazoo* that upheld the legality of tax-supported public education.¹⁷
- 1875** The Ithaca Academy hosts its final commencement ceremony. The *Ithaca Democrat* reports, “The Ithaca Academy is now a thing of the past, and in its place we are to have a higher school, with no better literary advantages, but an increased taxation to support it. It will however gratify some of ‘the friends of education in Ithaca’ who are hungry for a position under, or in it.”¹⁸
- 1875** *Ithaca High School* opens and marks the beginning of public secondary education in Ithaca. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “The public schools opened today and the children are all happy.”¹⁹

- 1876** Lucien Wait, head of the mathematics department at Cornell, founds the Cascadilla School. Wait opened the school in order “to prepare students for entrance into the university.”²⁰
- 1879** Jesse A. Johnson, eldest child of Underground Railroad conductor George A. Johnson, becomes the first black person to graduate from Ithaca High School. E. S. Esty, president of the Ithaca School Board of Education, offers words during the commencement ceremony: “Do not receive these diplomas merely as certificates of acquirements in success already achieved, but rather regard them as the keys which shall unlock for you the doors of the colleges and universities. Regard these as but the stepping stones by means of which you may go up higher. Always room at the top said Daniel Webster. Although the lower and middle ranks jostle each other in competition, and struggle for position and support, how serenely the comparatively few who attain eminence stand, both in life and history.”²¹
- 1883** Morris Kurtz publishes a small book that documents various people and resources in Ithaca. He writes, “In educational facilities, Ithaca presents advantages that are equaled by few localities in this country, the courses of study being complete, in continuity and thoroughness, from the time of entering the primaries until graduation at Cornell University.”²²
- 1883** In his year-end report, Ithaca School Board of Education President E. S. Esty writes, “I have watched not without interest the conflict going on in many districts between the Catholic and anti-Catholic elements, and have felt to congratulate both classes in our community that the good sense shown by both sides has so far saved us from harm to our schools from such dissensions . . .”²³
- 1884** Immaculate Conception Parochial School is established.²⁴
- 1889** In his year-end report, Ithaca School Board of Education President E. S. Esty writes, “Among other prominent reasons why we have attained this proud position is the fact that we have studiously avoided, so far as was practicable, all questions from which conflicting interests might arise and our endeavor has been to steadily adhere to the fixed purpose to secure the greatest advantage and attain the highest possible results.”²⁵
- 1890** Charles Chauveau becomes the first black person to graduate from Cornell University.²⁶
- 1892** Ithaca College is founded. William Grant Egbert, founder, states, “It is my plan to build a school of music second to none in the excellence of its faculty, the soundness of its educational ideals and the superior quality of instruction.”²⁷



Courtesy of The History Center Archives: Ithaca, NY (#V30.6)

Illustration A.5.2: Ithaca Central School Class Photo (1885 or 1886)

1895 William A. George establishes the Junior Republic in Freeville, NY. Attempting to replicate the social and economic hierarchies of U.S. society, George states, “I do not believe the Junior Republic is an ideal scheme, a Utopia, but I think it is the best thing yet invented for these classes of boys and girls. It is simply a plain matter-of-fact United States on a small scale, and the conditions social, civic, and economic are made to conform as near as possible to those of the great republic. What the youthful citizens learn they acquire by actual experience. Our maxim is ‘Nothing Without Labor.’”²⁸

1902 Ithaca Superintendent Frank Boynton publishes an article in *The School Review*. Boynton writes, “That high schools do not reach the masses as they should and as they can and must, will be generally admitted. To suppose that they are not alive to this condition, or that they are not making strenuous effort to widen the scope of their influence, would be at once to make a grave error and do them serious injustice . . . The American high school was not designed, like its predecessor, the old academy, for a college preparatory school. Its chief and ultimate aim is the preparation of young men and women for American citizenship. The curricula of tax-supported schools must be elastic enough to respond to the pulse of reasonable popular demand.”²⁹

- 1905** Ithaca College archive yearbook photos indicate the first black graduate of Ithaca College. Her name is not yet identifiable.³⁰
- 1906** Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity establishes founding chapter. The AΦA website states, “Alpha Phi Alpha, the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity established for African-Americans, was founded at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York by seven college men who recognized the need for a strong bond of Brotherhood among African descendants in this country.”³¹
- 1911** Cornellian James B. Clarke writes about race prejudice at Cornell. Clarke writes, “In the South it is, of course, out of the question for a colored person to think of entering an institution of the standard of Cornell. In the North a dark face is often turned away, disappointed and deceived, from a school that is not honest enough to put up the sign: NO DARKIES.”³²
- 1912** Ithaca High School building destroyed by a fire. A promotional brochure for the construction of a new tax supported building entitled, *Our Proposed New School: For all the Children of all the People*, states, “*Ithaca is known around the world as an educational center, a reputation which it has enjoyed for over a half-century. Not only has it been known for its great and growing university, but its public schools have attracted much attention not only in this state but elsewhere.*”³³
- 1915** The Annual (Ithaca High School Yearbook) promotes IHS as “Cornell’s Largest Fitting School.” The ad further claims, “The Ithaca High School sends more students to college than any other school in the state,” and, “This school gets students from nearly every county in New York state, every state in the Union, and from nearly every country.”³⁴
- 1922** Ithaca’s black newspaper, *The Monitor*, congratulates four graduating seniors from IHS. The paper states, “We wish more of our young people were graduating this year and hope that these young ladies will continue to study and make a mark for themselves and for the race, as there is plenty of room for such material and the race needs you.”³⁵
- 1925** Ku Klux Klan marches through downtown Ithaca. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “Ku Klux Klansmen and Klanswomen estimated at nearly 500 in number, marched through the city streets Saturday afternoon in a spectacular parade, witnessed from the curb by thousands . . . A float accompanied the parade, on which were Klan children ostensibly listening to a religious teacher as she pored over a large volume of the Holy Bible before her . . . Banners proclaimed contingents from Seneca and Chemung counties, and one designated a group of Tompkins County women.”³⁶



Courtesy of The History Center Archives, Ithaca, NY (#P1-1)

Illustration A.5.3: Ku Klux Klan Parade in Ithaca, NY (1925)

- 1935** Massive storm and subsequent flooding kills 8 people and leaves many Ithacans without homes. Two days after the record flood, the *Ithaca Journal* reports, “The misery of Ithaca flood refugees driven from their south and west end homes early Monday morning today pushed into the background as a minor detail in the damage brought by madly racing waters.”³⁷
- 1938** The South Side Community Center opens in new building. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt attends the dedication ceremony and offers brief words to the audience, “I dedicate this building to the service of the people of the community. I am glad the two races are working together, for in that way we will have a better understanding. Here in this building you will find a happier, healthier, better future for your children and therefore a happier and better community.”³⁸
- 1939** John A. Mack (Cornell University) completes master’s thesis focused on Ithaca High School. He writes, “The students who are on a regular allowance seemed to rank higher in achievement, on the average, than any other group who reported any single method of getting spending money.” Mack adds, “When students from certain districts which constantly send low achievement pupils are being advised, they could be directed into required courses more nearly fitting their probable accomplishment, and into elective course meeting their vocational purposes.”³⁹

- 1944** Emma Rose Elliott (Cornell University) completes master's thesis focused on Ithaca High School. She writes, "For a city of its size and location, Ithaca has a relatively large Negro population. Doubtlessly, this fact is related to the presence of the university. Negroes can find employment here as cooks, kitchen workers, and housekeepers in dormitories, fraternity and sorority houses, and private homes. One of the Community Centers, of which Ithaca has three, is maintained for the negro group. And the activities of their young people center around the 'South Side House' to a large extent. By the time local negro children have reached high school age, they have developed a definite group feeling. They are apt not only to overtly resent any implications of inferiority, but also to read slight into situations when none was intended. Thus, Ithaca teachers frequently find it even unwise to encourage white and colored groups to mingle in classroom situations. There is always the danger that a negro child will resent some unwitting act or comment of a white child, and the negro group make physical retaliation later."⁴⁰
- 1948** Harold Wood (Cornell University) completes master's thesis focused on Ithaca High School. He writes, "Nearly all of the reasons given for withdrawal in this study were, to varying degrees, related to undesirable economic circumstances . . . Many of the withdrawals expressed regret over the fact that they did not remain in high school to graduate, and several said that they plan to return to school to complete the work required for a high school diploma. Not a single youth expressed satisfaction with his decision to withdraw from high school and make his own way in the world."⁴¹
- 1953** Barbara Blais writes a term paper, *A report on the Proposed Consolidation of Ithaca Area School Districts*, for a government course taught by Ithaca Superintendent W. L. Gragg. The paper is included in the Report on the Proposed Consolidation of Ithaca Area School Districts. Blais writes, "A number of Ithaca people have told me they felt consolidation would be harmful to the school system. The main objections seemed to be that, bringing in schools of lower standards would necessarily lower the standards of city schools, and that the city would be unfairly burdened financially in making the necessary improvements in the facilities of the suburban districts."⁴²
- 1956** Rural School District Consolidation: The *Ithaca Journal* reports, "Effective July 1st, 42 suburban school districts and the Ithaca City school district were consolidated. Fifteen buildings in the area outside the city will be used and five will be closed. A total of 25 buildings will be in operation."⁴³

- 1957** Chester Koons (Cornell University) completes masters thesis focused on Ithaca High School. He states, “The author’s general conclusion is that the low students are not second rate citizens of the high school community, but rather they are, for the most part, good citizens working up to their limited natural abilities. They are usually not leaders within the high school, but, as followers, they do perform certain functions within the high school that entitles them to full citizenship . . . To re-state again a general proposition of this paper, the author would like to emphasize that the low group will most likely not become the leaders in the community, but should fill the necessary jobs of responsible followers.”⁴⁴
- 1960** The new Ithaca Senior High School opens moving students from downtown to the North Cayuga Street campus. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “Students and administrators at the Ithaca High School gave enthusiastic approval of their new home and facilities today.”⁴⁵
- 1961** Minutes from Ithaca’s Council for Equality state, “Discussion centered around the recent incidents in Ithaca, involving high school students in inter-racial clashes. The background of these incidents was pieced together, and it was generally felt that more difficulties might be expected. Several people present had attended the meeting with the Mayor which had taken place after these incidents, and they reported that there had been general agreement at that meeting that there should be some sort of a permanent committee set up to deal with such problems.”⁴⁶
- 1965** Dr. Mason, Superintendent of ICSD, proposes the Community Involvement Plan to help disadvantaged children in Ithaca schools. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “The most significant part of the program, educationally, would be providing special ‘tracks’ for the educationally disadvantaged and in hiring a coordinator-counselor to coordinate community efforts to help these children, Mason said. ‘Tracking’ in education is an arrangement where special experiences, teachers, or programs are provided to fill a specific pupil ability or need. Special tracks already are provided for superior and exceptional pupils. This tracking would not be one in which disadvantaged pupils would be isolated, but one in which they would be given special class assistance and provided with extra personal help, he explained.”⁴⁷
- 1967** The Afro-American Club begins at Ithaca High School. Under the title, “*Negroes Form New Club*,” the 1968 IHS Annual states, “The Afro-American Club, headed by our new Health teacher, Mr. Nixon, promises to become quite an active club. Its purpose is to study the history of the Negro in American Culture. The members observed the National Negro History week in February and held a bake sale in the cafeteria. Besides holding discussions, they had Dr. Corinne Galvin, a noted lecturer, speak to them.”⁴⁸

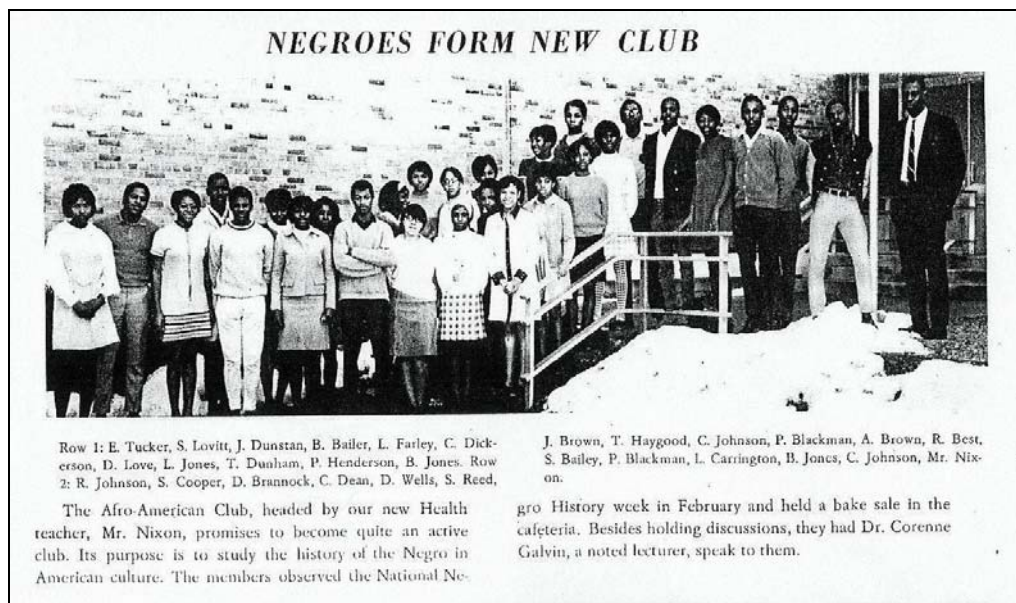


Kroch Division of Rare and Manuscripts Collection: Cornell University.

Illustration A.5.4: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visit to Cornell University (1961)

1969 Willard Straight Takeover. According to an Africana Studies & Research Center (AS&RC) Takeover Study Guide, “On April 19, 1969, black students occupied Willard Straight during Parents’ Weekend as a continuing form of protest about racial issues on campus. Citing the university’s racist attitudes and irrelevant curriculum, the students occupied the building for thirty-six hours. The takeover received national attention as thousands of black and white students became involved, which engaged the community in broad discussion about race relations and educational matters. For many the image of students leaving the Straight with guns is the only lasting memory they have of the takeover. However, it was more than that. The guns were introduced in the seizure of a building only after groups of white students had attacked the black students occupying the Straight. After the peaceful end of the takeover, Cornell University introduced a curriculum in Africana Studies and established the Africana Studies & Research Center.”⁴⁹

- 1969** The educational team of the Cornell Summer Work-Scholarship Program creates 115-plus page report entitled “Black People and the Ithaca City School District.” The director, Paul DuBois, writes the introduction and states, “I believe that when a significant segment of our school-age population—the poorer children, the Blacks, the other minority groups—constantly demonstrate lower academic performance than their middle-class, white counterparts, the blame for the group differentials must be directed toward the system that is supposed to serve all our children equally. When groups of our children predictably will fail in school, the school system is failing its responsibility to the children.”⁵⁰
- 1969** Black Counseling Service is created as a collaboration between the Southside Community Center and the Ithaca City School District. “On November 25, 1969 the Black community began to seriously re-evaluate the type of education that Black students were receiving. A great many people concluded that Black students were not adequately prepared for college and work. This was confirmed when eleven of eighteen Black Ithaca High School Graduates of that period were enrolled in remedial type special programs on college campuses. It was apparent that the school personnel were unable to serve our Black students adequately. It was felt that the counseling service needed to be supplemented, so that the students could be made aware of opportunities for learning and advancement. Therefore, a black counseling program, supported and financed by the Ithaca Board of education, was conceived, planned, and initiated on November 25, 1969.”⁵¹
- 1970** ICSD Board of Education minutes include an answer sheet to Questions Raised by Tompkins County Taxpayers Association. Some of the issues posed by the Association include questions about the qualifications to hire new counselors, evaluation of the Trump plan (module scheduling), banning Students for a Democratic Society from IHS campus, and “We request the birthday of the F.B.I. Director, J. Edgar Hoover, be recognized as a holiday. At a time when chaos is running rampant across America, it is only fitting that this great Law and Order representative be recognized for his great contributions to our country.”⁵²
- 1973** Club Essence is formed. Deidre Hill states the club was created in “response to a need to establish more social and civic activity for Black women.” The primary fundraising activities of Club Essence provide “scholarships for college-bound high school students.”⁵³



Ithaca High School Annual ©1968.

Illustration A.5.5: Ithaca High School Afro-American Club (1967)

- 1974** The Lehman Alternative Community School (LACS) begins. Originally known as the “New Junior High Program,” the public school option “was created by the Board of Education in following one of a series of recommendations made to the Superintendent of Schools and School Board of the Ithaca City School District by the blue-ribbon ‘Alternative Education Committee.’”⁵⁴
- 1976** Ithaca undertakes a contentious redistricting plan.⁵⁵ The redistricting plan closes a number of elementary schools—including Henry St. John elementary school (primarily serving the Southside community). Katherine Eisenberger gives a presentation to the Board of Education on the results of the Community Household Survey. Eisenberger states, “It was overwhelmingly clear that the Ithaca community feels strongly about its schools, and holds dear the role education plays in their lives and in those of their school children . . . There were segments of the community which expressed the sentiment that discrimination between the ‘haves and have-nots’ is in evidence in the schools and should be eliminated . . . There was a great concern that closing a neighborhood school might spell the decline of a neighborhood unity and cohesiveness.”⁵⁶
- 1980** A letter from ICSD Superintendent Richard Backer dated April 23, 1980, acknowledges district errors and lack of communication. The event concerns allegations of a student in possession of pistol.⁵⁷



The Monitor, Ithaca, NY (1923)

Illustration A.5.6: Ithaca's Black Newspaper—The Monitor (1923)

- 1981** ICSD considers eliminating Black Counseling Service. As director of the service, Nantambu Bomani writes, “To discontinue this program would be just like ‘cutting a heart from a body’ and the Black Counseling Services is a vital link to the Black students, school, parents and community.”⁵⁸
- 1981** Ithaca Black Caucus hosts a conference on “The Educational Needs of Black Children: the Ithaca Experience.”⁵⁹
- 1986** Ithaca undertakes a contentious redistricting plan. The *Report of the Subcommittee of the Administrative Council of Board of Education of the Ithaca City School District on the Space Problems of the Belle Sherman, Central and Northeast Schools* states, “one of the principles related to the desirability of multicultural and multiracial mix requires some brief discussion. Our implementation of our strong commitment to that principle and the social values it represents for education raised deep concerns within the subcommittee about the means necessary to achieve that goal in our proposed plan—the bussing of predominately low income and black elementary students to a variety of schools somewhat distant from their homes. After much discussion, the overwhelming majority of the subcommittee reaffirmed its commitment to the predominance of the principle of multicultural and multiracial mix schools in recommending a plan to resolve the current space problems.”⁶⁰
- 1986** WHCU’s Night Sounds airs a segment on the ICSD’s plan to cut the Affirmative Action Office. Commentator Annette Laurier-Skates asks, “Why is the Affirmative Action Office so expendable?” and “How does eliminating this position further the goals of the district?”⁶¹
- 1987** Ithaca Youth Council creates the film *Racism: The Intolerable Issue*. The youth leaders state, “A reason for making this video is a response to public outcry over racial tensions that exist in our community.”⁶²
- 1988** In the book *One Day in Ithaca, May 17, 1988* (commemorating Ithaca’s centennial), Paul McBride writes, “Ithaca itself is a colonized community. Moreover, as a college professor, I am one of the colonizers. My nation is Academia. In the last 120 years or so, the academics (as citizens of this nation are called) have taken over the city, shaped its values, its entertainment, its public school system and even its government. The ‘greasers’ or ‘farmers,’ as offspring of the academics call the natives, flunk out of school at shamefully high rates. They graduate from tracked programs which guarantee them a career no higher than a McDonald’s manager. They can be seen any time of the day playing video games [at] Deebe’s, a hang-out near the high school, or sneaking smokes down by the creek. They have not so much failed school, as school them. Ithaca’s schools have become the institutional tools of the colonizers, preparing their children for positions of

influence in the nation of Academia. Even organizations historically dedicated to service the native of the inner city, such as the YMCA, have become the servant of the upper middle class. The YMCA is no longer downtown, near the poor, but instead enjoys a fashionable location near the out-of-town shopping mall where its function is not unlike that of middle class country club. We academics convince ourselves that the greasers, townies and farmers are better off with our influence. Such is the thinking of colonizers throughout history.”⁶³

- 1991** WHCU’s Night Sounds airs a radio program on black students at IHS. Teachers, parents, and students call for an increase of black faculty/staff, support for Black Counseling Services, better curriculum, examination of tracking, and generally better preparation of black students.⁶⁴
- 1994** ICSD creates Institutional Racism Strategic Action Plan. The plan states, “One of the key ways systemic oppression has continued in America for hundreds of years is how subtle and unconscious the process continues to be. If the district were to follow this objective it would be acknowledging the need to overcome its own built-in institutional and personal bias with the cooperation of a consulting team giving voice in key decision making areas to ‘the other.’”⁶⁵
- 1994** Leadership and Multicultural Alliance Project (LMAP) is created. LMAP is a collaborative project between the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, the Multicultural Resource Center, the Community Dispute Resolution Center, and Training for Change Associates. The project is designed to bring together youth from diverse backgrounds to build appreciation for their own cultures and for their peers’ cultures, as well as to groom youth to take leadership roles in their schools and communities.⁶⁶
- 1995** Ithaca High School considers the elimination of tracking in science classes. The *New York Times* reports, “The issue became the focus of the school board elections on May 2. More than 5,000 voters—twice as many as in any recent school election—turned out to vote for three open seats, and two of the three incumbents who favored abolishing honors classes were defeated. On the nine-member board, there is now a bloc of four potential votes for keeping the honors classes . . . Inside the high school’s complex of squat buildings, science teachers said that they have long been teaching the same material to both honors and Regents students, forced to do so by the necessities of statewide Regents exams. Indeed, they contended that the distinction between classes is a matter more of prestige than substance and say that they intend to raise the level of the combined classes to honors standard and not the other way around.”⁶⁷

- 1995** The *Syracuse Post-Standard* reports, “A crowd of about 100 demonstrators Wednesday called on the community and the school district to do more to fight racism in the wake of a fight at Ithaca High School Tuesday.”⁶⁸
- 1995** ICSD Board unanimously adopts Elimination of Prejudice and Intuitional Racism resolution. The resolution states, “WHEREAS, the Ithaca City School District Board of Education acknowledges that racism is a serious problem within our jurisdiction and; WHEREAS, the Ithaca City School District Board of Education recognizes the need for government and community leadership to take sustained action to address this problem; THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Ithaca City School District Board of Education agrees to make combating racism in our community a top priority for the coming year, and; BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Ithaca City School District Board of Education will see that our budget decisions reflect this commitment as much as possible and will make this issue a top budgeting priority starting in 1995–1996.”⁶⁹
- 1996** The *IHS Office of Minority Student Affairs (OMSA) Report for 1995–96* includes a number of suggestions. Assistant to the Principal for OMSA, Dr. John Raible, writes, “The primary focus of my work this year has been on decreasing the number of interracial conflicts at IHS by working with students involved in fights. Last year, when I first became interested in applying for the OMSA position, I spoke with then-superintendent James Lorthridge. I asked him what he envisioned as the main goal for the new person in OMSA. His response was this: ‘I need someone to go in there to prevent the bloodbath from happening. It could happen at any moment, or it could happen a year from now.’ Even as we spoke, a phone call came in to his office, informing us that yet another fight requiring police intervention had just taken place at the high school.”⁷⁰
- 1997** Tompkins County Board of Representatives hosts a countywide, three-day *Future Search Conference on Racism*. The final conference report includes key trends in education: “tracking that fails to meet individual student needs; failure to educate students of color; failure to educate students about history of other cultures; denial of racism; many committees, few solutions.”⁷¹
- 1997** Parents of African/Latino/a Students (PALS) creates a list of questions for the new principal. One question states, “At this time, Ithaca High School is 9.4% African American, and 1.6% Hispanic. Only 2% of all African American and Hispanic students are in AP or Honors classes. Conversely, we are 23.6% of the Special Ed department. How can we turn this around? What can you or are you planning to do different to ensure the success and high academic achievement of our students?”⁷²

- 1997** The *Utne Reader* names Ithaca the Most Enlightened Community in America. The story begins, “There’s a faintly penciled line of graffiti in the men’s room at the DeWitt Mall in downtown Ithaca, New York, that reads: ‘Places for graffiti like this provide a forum for people who otherwise might not be able to express themselves.’ You’ve got to love a town where populist values are on display so openly—and so politely—even in the john.”⁷³
- 1998** English/Media Production class creates the film, *Diversity at IHS*. One of the interviewees states, “There needs to be higher expectations for a lot of minority students. I’m fortunate to have my parents who have very high expectations for me. And um there—I don’t think there’s enough encouragement for minority students—specifically black students—to take honors and AP classes.”⁷⁴
- 1998** Bridge Across Cultures 21st Century Learning Center Grant. The program incorporated a number of ways to bring together Enfield and Beverly J. Martin elementary students including some middle school students. Program ends in 2003.⁷⁵



Courtesy of The History Center Archives: Ithaca, NY (#M1.58).

Illustration A.5.7: Clean Up of Ithaca Flood (1935)


- 1998** Drs. James Turner and Don Barr conduct research at IHS. The final report, *Race and Education at Ithaca High School*, includes the results from an IHS faculty and staff questionnaire. Of the more prominent results, “Seventy five of the 100 responses showed a high level of discomfort and fear about disciplining African American and Latino/Latina students . . . Overall the responses to this question describe a school environment where teachers, staff and administrators are hesitant when interacting with students of color and even worse, so uncomfortable and afraid that they avoid setting behavioral limits and academic demands. Permissiveness is a subtle and powerful form of rejection, and these data indicate that African American males in particular are allowed to roam freely with little accountability for both their behavior and academic work.”⁷⁶
- 1998** Jose Paulino—Assistant to the Principal for Minority Student Affairs—resigns citing lack of support. In a guest editorial published in the *Ithaca Journal*, Paulino writes, “It has appeared to me that supporting staff of color is a real issue within the Ithaca City School District . . . I did not leave to pursue opportunities in New York. I did not leave because I missed an urban environment. I left solely because I had no support from my principal(s) and some other colleagues.”⁷⁷
- 1999** School Issues Group, among others, calls for a public forum to discuss ICSD practices and procedures regarding staff of color. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “There was at least one immediate response to Wednesday night’s emotion-packed forum on the Ithaca City School District’s treatment of staff of color. Board of Education President Steve Shiffrin put time on Tuesday night’s board agenda to discuss how the board will deal with the concerns and suggestions raised at the meeting.”⁷⁸
- 1999** In its “Year in Review,” the *Ithaca Journal* writes, “From the temporary closing of a black-owned barbershop to diversity policies at the Ithaca City School District to a horrific hate crime in Caroline, race relations played a dominant role in many of the incidents and issues of 1999.”⁷⁹
- 2000** *Newsweek* lists the top 100 high schools in the United States. Ithaca High School is listed 83rd.⁸⁰
- 2000** Dr. Don Barr and Ithaca High School math teacher David Bock conduct research on IHS. The final report, *A Retrospective Study of the Impact of Race And Class on Academic Success at Ithaca High School*, states, “The reality is that those at the bottom of the hierarchy of economic stratification have a great deal in common. They have experienced systemic oppression for hundreds of years. They share a common socio-economic class experience defined by limited life chances. Keeping the poor poor, and keeping the dark and white skinned fighting each other for scarce resources is part of the plan

to keep them in their place and in conflict with each other. If an interracial group of low income poor families were to organize and challenge the injustice their children experience in school, they could be a powerful force for change.”⁸¹

THE ITHACA HIGH SCHOOL

“Cornell’s Largest Fitting School”

“The Ithaca High School sends more students to college than any other school in the state.”
MELVIL, DEWEY, *Ex-Secretary Board of Regents.*



“My acquaintance with the preparatory schools of the United States leads me to believe that the Ithaca High School stands in the very front rank.”
J. G. SCHURMAN, *President Cornell University.*

Year	No. Entering College
1901	76
1902	55
1903	67
1904	78
1905	76
1906	76

This school gets students from nearly every county in New York state, every state in the Union and from nearly every country. It is thoroughly equipped—libraries, laboratories, etc.; employs only teachers of proved success.

In recent years it has won seventy-nine State and twenty three University Scholarships, and has the distinction of having prepared nearly One Thousand students for various college work.

Special classes for state Scholarship work.
Courses in stenography, typewriting, bookkeeping, public speaking, etc.
Has gymnasium, seven-acre athletic field on which are baseball diamonds, tennis courts, basketball courts, football etc.
Both sexes. Enter any time. Tuition \$100.
For catalog, address F. D. BOYNTON, D. Pd., Superintendent and Principal, Ithaca, N. Y.

Ithaca High School Annual ©1907

Illustration A.5.8: Cornell’s Largest Fitting School (1907)

- 2001

ICSD Board votes to “downsize” the Affirmative Action and Multicultural Education office,⁸² and the superintendent disbands the Ithaca City School District’s Affirmative Action Committee.⁸³
- 2002

Village at Ithaca is created. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “Representatives from the School Issues Group, Ithaca High School’s Parents of African-American and Latino Students, the Mentoring Program for Young Black Males, the Saturday Science and Mathematics Academy, the Welfare to Work Program of Catholic Charities, the Greater Ithaca Activities Center, Southside Community Center, teachers and administrators from the Ithaca City School District, civic leaders, and ministers from several churches crowded into the conference room of the Tompkins County Human Services Building to unite

on behalf of students of color in Ithaca.”⁸⁴

- 2002** The ICSD Board of Education adopts the following as Goal #1: “As part of a long time effort, the Board will focus on enhancing Student Achievement in accord with the District’s Mission. The immediate objective is to support all students with programs that eliminate race and class as a predictor of performance. Assuming progress on that issue, the next objective is to stretch the talents of all youngsters toward and even beyond mastery levels of achievement.”⁸⁵
- 2004** Racial Fights—*Ithaca Journal* reports, “Apprehension that racial tensions exist between some students at Ithaca High School was made clear this week by parents pulling their kids out of school, and students saying they’re eager for conversation on the subject.”⁸⁶
- 2004** United States Department of Justice—Community Relations Service (CRS) is called to conduct an investigation. CRS suggests Ithaca High School run a “SPIRIT” group (acronym for Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together) as an attempt to decrease tensions and hostilities.⁸⁷
- 2004** ICSD creates the Equity Strategic Action Plan. According to the document, “This plan is in support of the Ithaca Board of Education’s goal to ‘eliminate race and class as predictors of student success.’ These elements outline both manageable action steps to achieve tangible results in the short term, and a meaningful, integrated long-term strategy. The strategy involves the school district, families, community organizations, and higher education in a collaborative effort. The component parts, taken together, form a comprehensive strategy, but they should not be seen as a linear, sequential plan. Rather, all elements can be pursued concurrently, with different work groups focusing their efforts on different parts of the plan at the same time.”⁸⁸
- 2004** Dr. Roberta Wallitt creates film *Breaking the Silence: Asian American Students Speak Out*. The video contains a facilitated conversation among a group of Tibetan and Cambodian young people about their school experiences and includes a discussion of what supported and what hindered their progress.⁸⁹
- 2004** ICSD Board of Education debates the elimination of Assistant to the Principal for Multicultural Affairs positions.⁹⁰
- 2005** Village at Ithaca Video Project includes interviews with students talking about high school experiences with racism, tracking, lowered expectations, feelings of isolation, and culturally responsive curriculum and staff.⁹¹
- 2005** “How Our Kids Become Unequal” is the front-page headline of the February 12, 2005 edition of the *Ithaca Journal*. The story reports the graduation rate

for African American students at Ithaca High School is 50%.⁹²

- 2005** Ithaca undertakes a contentious redistricting plan. In May, members of the group, *Concerned Citizens for Neighborhood Schools*, file a suit to prevent redistricting plans. Plaintiffs argued that their children would suffer “irreparable harm” if they had to attend Beverley J. Martin elementary. Case is dismissed on procedural grounds in 2007.⁹³
- 2005** Forum held at Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC) to discuss the use of a book, *War Comes to Willy Freeman*, which includes multiple appearances of the racial epithet *nigger*.⁹⁴
- 2005** The Community Foundation of Tompkins County hosted a Critical Issues Roundtable: *Inclusive Communities: Breaking the Barriers*. This event was shaped and facilitated by local high school students “to address the concerns of youth about their experience of diversity and inclusion when they are not in school.”⁹⁵
- 2006** Dr. Ronald Ferguson conducts the Tripod Project—a survey focused on racial disparities in high-achieving suburban schools.⁹⁶ The IHS *Tattler* reports, “Ithaca City School District Superintendent Judith Pastel said that the survey serves a unique and unusual purpose. ‘Very clearly we have an achievement gap based on race, class, and disabilities. I’m not happy about it, but it’s real. We do not give many opportunities for students to voice their opinions about why they are or aren’t achieving.’”
- 2006** Amelia Kearney takes her case to the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission to address the harassment of her daughter during the 2005–06 school year.⁹⁷
- 2006** Ithaca High School bans the wearing or display of the Confederate flag. An *Ithaca Journal* editorial states, “[I]n a letter sent to parents and guardians of Ithaca High School students, Principal Joe Wilson announced to the community that his school will no longer allow any students to wear or carry any item that contains an image of the Confederate Flag. The national banner of the ill-fated Confederate States of America, Wilson wrote, ‘has caused and continues to cause feelings of ill will. . . . Such feelings in turn have led to disruptions to our operations and educational process.’”⁹⁸
- 2006** The Village at Ithaca and the ICSD create the First Annual Equity Report Card.⁹⁹
- 2006** A.C.T.I.O.N. (Activists Committed To Interrupting Oppression Now) is formed “to take more direct action” against inequity in the ICSD.¹⁰⁰
- 2006** Student panel and community forum held at Southside Community Center. Students expressed concerns/anger over open displays of racism (confederate

flags, racist language, graffiti, lower expectations, and more).¹⁰¹

- 2006** Students, faculty and community members meet with City of Ithaca Common Council—Environmental and Neighborhoods Services committee (former Community and Neighborhood Services). Students express concerns about their experiences at Ithaca High School.¹⁰²
- May 2007** Protest at the Board of Education. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “Prior to Tuesday evening’s Ithaca City School District Board of Education meeting, a group of about 120 people gathered outside the district’s office to protest what they see as a lack of equity in the enforcement of district policies.”¹⁰³
- Sept 2007** ICSD Board votes to challenge the Human Rights case of Amelia Kearney with a particular challenge to Human Rights jurisdiction in public schools. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “The Ithaca City School District will pursue an injunction to block a hearing scheduled for Monday with the New York State Division of Human Rights. After adjourning their regular meeting session and speaking in a closed executive session Tuesday night, the board came back into public session and authorized the school district’s attorney to file a ‘motion for a preliminary injunction precluding the Division of Human Rights from conducting further proceedings with respect to the complaints brought against the district,’ Superintendent Judith Pastel said.”¹⁰⁴
- Sept 2007** Protest at the Board of Education. The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “A group of college students, high school students and community members besieged the office of Ithaca City School District Superintendent Judith Pastel Monday demanding an audience with the administrator to address the district’s challenge of New York’s Human Rights Law.”¹⁰⁵
- Oct 2007** Student-led walkout at Ithaca High School. An open letter from student organizers states, “We walked out of school for a reason, not because we are ‘class-cutting trouble-makers.’ The Countdown to Equality is not about violence. It is about justice. We want equality. We want an end to discrimination of all kinds in the ICSD. Despite what has happened so far, and the obstacles we have faced, this campaign is not over. We want to remember yesterday, but live for tomorrow!”¹⁰⁶
- Oct 2007** The *Ithaca Journal* reports, “Almost half of Ithaca High School’s student body was absent from school for at least half of Thursday, estimated Ithaca City School District Superintendent Judith Pastel. The absences came after parents expressed concern for their children’s safety due to rumors this week that something violent would occur at the school.”¹⁰⁷



Ithaca High School *Tattler* ©2007.

Illustration A.5.9: Ithaca High School Student Walkout (2007, October)

Oct 2007 In calling for the community to move forward, the *Ithaca Journal* editorialized that the most recent situation is “one of the worst racially charged messes in school district (and area) history.”¹⁰⁸

Jan 2008 Administrative law judge submits findings of fact, recommendation, decision and order in *Kearney v. Ithaca City School District*. Beyond recommending the ICSD pay \$1 million USD in compensatory damages, Hon. Christine Kellet recommends “that within 60 days of the Commissioner’s Final Order, that the Respondent’s teachers, administrators, school bus drivers, cleaning staff and all other employees be trained in the recognition of discrimination and the effects of discrimination on children; that Respondent review and revise its student disciplinary code to incorporate effective progressive options for changing student behavior; that the Respondent in conjunction with the Division develop plans for the creation of proactive programs for students and their parents to address discrimination; and that the Respondent develop staffing plans to insure the District’s staff has the diversity and tools necessary to end the racial disharmony evidenced by the record at this public hearing.”¹⁰⁹



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Illustration A.5.10: Hip-Hop Pioneers at Southside Community Center (2008, October)

Timeloop Endnotes:

¹ See Harry Melone's (1929) *A Sesqui-Centennial Souvenir describing One Hundred and Fifty Years of Progress*, p. 5. It is dangerous to begin this history with European arrival. The Cayuga Nation and Iroquois Confederacy have a long history that predates the U.S./Britain revolutionary war and Sullivan's campaign. Melone is referring to the Finger Lakes "campaign" in general and not simply the specific events of Coregonal. Throughout the book, Melone is apologetic in the retelling of Sullivan's military legacy. Melone writes, "Historians and casual readers have often questioned the seeming ruthlessness with which the colonist, blazing the path of the new republic, trampled down every vestige of the domination of the conquerors of two centuries. But the Sullivan campaign was more than a cruel, punitive expedition. The vigor and decisiveness of the methods employed merely reflect what Washington and his counselors considered the necessities created by conditions in the New York Colony" (p. 5). For more information on the history of Ithaca's settlement, see the works of local historians: Carol Kammen's (1985) *The Peopling of Tompkins County: A social history* and Jane Dieckmann's (1986) *A Short History of Tompkins County*.

² Noting that enslavement was legal in New York State until 1827, Field Horne writes that "many early settlers brought human chattel in addition to moveable goods into Ithaca" (p. 18). Horne's essay, "Ithaca's Black Community," can be found in Young Armstead et al.'s (1988) *A Heritage Uncovered: The Black Experience in Upstate New York 1800–1925*. Records indicate that black Ithacans actively resisted enslavement. Mr. Peter Webb paid Mr. Speed \$384 in 1818 for his

emancipation (Kammen, 1985). Sidney Gallwey (1960) writes that after securing emancipation, Mr. Webb attended an abolitionist meeting where his former master spoke and advocated gradual emancipation. Upon hearing Mr. Speed's words, Mr. Webb "arose and remarked that he had formerly been one of Mr. Speed's slaves and that Mr. Speed had given him his freedom, but not until he bought and paid for it and earned the money with his own hands." and adds, "This turn in the discussion was unexpected, and Mr. Speed was real taken down by it" (Gallwey, 1960, n.p.). For additional references to slavery in Tompkins County, see Sydney H. Gallwey's (1962) "Early Slaves and Freemen of Tompkins County" or Kammen's (1985) *The Peopling of Tompkins County*.

³ See Morris Kurtz (1883) *Ithaca and its Resources*, p. 58. In other accounts of the early settlers, Robert McDowell is listed as the "owner" of Richard Loomis. McDowell is connected to education and enslavement in Ithaca.

⁴ See Dieckmann's (1986) *A Short History of Tompkins County*, p. 129. Dieckmann and others also make reference to a pre-existing Lancasterian system of schools in Ithaca.

⁵ See Peter Stansbury's (1822) *A Pedestrian Tour of Two Thousand Three Hundred Miles in North America: to the Lakes,—the Canadas,—and the New-England States. Performed in the Autumn of 1821*. Stansbury's book reads as a travelogue documenting his North American tour in 1822. He sings high praise for the landscape and people he encounters during his time in Ithaca (pp. 85–86).

⁶ See Waterman T. Hewett's (1905) *Cornell University: A history*. Hewett writes, "It was directed, April 10, 1822, that the charter of a college in Ithaca be granted whenever it should be shown within three years that a permanent fund of fifty thousand dollars had been collected for its support. It was, however, found impossible to raise this sum. This impulse, though fruitless in itself, may have led to the foundation of the Ithaca Academy, which was incorporated the following year, March 24, 1823" (p. 39).

⁷ See St. James African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) Zion webpage—"St. James Church History," available: <http://www.stjamesithaca.org/History.htm>. The website documents a number of historic events occurring at the church. St. James AME Zion's significant role in Ithaca's history—for the black community and beyond—is precisely why the church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. According to Claudia Montague's chapter in Sisler et al.'s (1988) *Ithaca's Neighborhoods: The Rhine, the Hill, and the Goose Pasture*, "St. James served a dual purpose in its early years. Not only was it a place of worship for free blacks in Tompkins County it also played a role in the Underground Railroad in the period before and during the Civil War" (p. 90). Church historians quote Douglass as saying St. James was the "neatest, cleanest, colored meeting house" he had visited.

⁸ See *Trustees Book of Record* (1833), Ithaca Public School District No. 16. The record—written in perfect script—also indicates that students must be vaccinated for smallpox and come to school with a clean face, clean hands, and clean clothes. Failure to adhere to the expected dress code would result in being denied entrance to the school.

⁹ Peter Wheeler's (1839) *Chains and Freedom: Or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler, a Colored Man Yet Living. A Slave in Chains, a Sailor on the Deep, and a Sinner at the Cross* was edited by C. E. Lester. Though difficult to find in print, Wheeler's narrative remains one of the few literary accounts of slavery in the North. For more information about such accounts, see John Blassingame's (1975, November) "Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems" in *Journal Of Southern History*. Again, for more information about slavery in Tompkins county, see Gallwey's (1962) *Early Slaves and Freemen of Tompkins County*; Sisler et al.'s (1988) *Ithaca's Neighborhoods: The Rhine, the Hill, and the Goose Pasture*; and Dieckmann's (1986) *A Short History of Tompkins County*. In fact, slavery is a large part of the early black narrative in Ithaca. There is the life of Daniel Jackson who, in death, tells yet another story of enslavement. Jackson's

headstone, resting just below Cornell University in the Ithaca Cemetery, reads, "Faithful Daniel Jackson (1814–1889) BORN A SLAVE. He followed The North Star to Freedom. He returned to bring his aged mother and tenderly cared for her as long as he lived, they were not long parted for she survived him but five years Daniel was 75 and his mother 103 yrs. of age. This Tribute belongs of right to Faithfulness and filial affection." Summarizing his research and the importance of this early history, Gallwey eloquently writes, "Among the 1,000 names which I have gathered over the span of five years, there are many more who could have been mentioned . . . All have been Negro pioneers. All have contributed to the community which we now share. And this is history, the history of the Negro from out of the Ithaca past. But today it lives again, breathing the breath of a new life into the heart of a struggling people" (n.p.).

¹⁰ This reference is from Horne's essay, and Horne cites the *New York Colored American*, 13 March 1841. While archival research has not yet provided confirmation, educational programs were most likely housed at St. James AME Zion Church.

¹¹ Horne, p. 20.

¹² Kammen is quoted in Michelle Reaves's article, "Church honors Black Civil War vets." (*Ithaca Journal*—2004, October 18). Kammen also authored the play "*I Am A Man Too: A History of Local Black Men and the Civil War*," which was performed locally in 2000 and 2003. The play was used as a fundraiser to construct a Civil War memorial and park adjacent to St. James AME Zion church. The black granite memorial lists the names of 26 Ithaca black men who enlisted for and fought in the Civil War.

¹³ Cornell's co-founder and namesake, Ezra Cornell, used this phrase during the first inauguration ceremony on October 7, 1868. In 2007, the shortened phrase was voted the best college motto in the United States. See "Cornell University's 'Any person . . . any study' named nation's best college motto by magazine" from the *Cornell Chronicle Online*: <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Aug07/mottoRank1.html>. Of any organization, institution or business, Cornell has exerted the largest influence on Ithaca and has had a direct impact on local primary/secondary education efforts. For more information on Cornell's founding, see Brian Frey's (2004) documentary, *Cornell: Birth of the American University* or Morris Bishop's (1967) *A History of Cornell*.

¹⁴ See Charlotte Conable's (1977) *Woman at Cornell: The Myth of Equal Education*. Confronted by a young feminist who argued Cornell embodied an institution that was oppressive to women, Conable researched the claim in an effort to offer a rebuttal. Conable writes, "The outspoken young woman had challenged many of my comfortable assumptions, and in anger I determined to search the records of this institution for convincing evidence that she was wrong" (p. 8). What she found, however, was a consistent pattern of discrimination. Differentiated instruction and discriminatory policies led Conable to conclude that while Cornell may have been founded upon a theory of "any person," the first 100 years of women's attendance at Cornell defines *unequal education*. She contends, "The study of women's history reveals a pattern of development which is cyclical in nature rather than evolutionary" (p. 11).

¹⁵ A digital copy of the letter is available via Cornell's Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections webpage. See, "Legacy of Leadership: Cornell's Twelve Presidents." Available: http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/presidents/view_item.php?sec=3&sub=8.

¹⁶ In 1874, New York State politicians had a lengthy debate about compulsory education, and not everyone was for public schools at public expense. The *New York Times* article "Enforced Education" (1874, March 3) stated, "[A] law for compulsory education is a great step to make, and we hardly believe the public or the Legislature are as yet fully prepared for it." For a sampling of the *New York Times* coverage of the 1874 debate, see: "Compulsory Education in New York" (*New*

York Times—1874, May 31); “Compulsory Education” (*New York Times*—1874, April 10); and “Compulsory Education: The law on the subject; What it requires and how to do it” (*New York Times*—1874, September 26). Both Joel Spring’s (2004) *The American School 1642–2004* and Carl Kaestle’s (1999) *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* offer additional insight into state hesitation to create tax-supported, compulsory education systems.

¹⁷ See *Stuart v. School District No. 1 of Kalamazoo*, 30 Mich. 69 (1874).

¹⁸ This quote is taken from Sevan Terzian’s (n.d.) “Some notes on the founding of Ithaca High School, 1873–1894.” Available at: www.icsd.k12.ny.us/highschool/foundingofihs.pdf. Terzian has written a number of pieces on the early history of Ithaca High School including “The Struggle for the Extracurriculum at Ithaca High School, 1890–1917” (*Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, Summer 2005) and “The Elusive Goal of School Spirit in the Comprehensive High School: A Case History, 1916–1941” (*High School Journal*, October/November 2004). Both of these articles complement his dissertation work (2000), *The Emergence of a Comprehensive High School: Ithaca High School in Ithaca, NY 1875–1941*. Terzian is an IHS alumnus, and his work is recommended to anyone wishing to better understand the early—and lasting—formation of Ithaca High School.

¹⁹ “Daily Journal.” (1875, September 6). *Ithaca Journal*, p. 4.

²⁰ See Dieckmann’s (1986) *A Short History of Tompkins County*, p. 126. The Cascadilla School was founded specifically as a preparatory school for admission to Cornell University. The school continues to maintain some affiliation with the university for senior coursework, meal plans, and extracurricular opportunities. For additional information on the Cascadilla School, see school website: <http://www.cascadillaschool.org>.

²¹ “Ithaca High School. Fourth Annual Commencement.” (1879, June 14). *Ithaca Journal*, p. 4.

²² See Morris Kurtz’s (1883) *Ithaca and its Resources*, p. 58.

²³ See E. S. Esty’s (1883) *President’s Report—Annual Report of the Board of Education of the Village of Ithaca*, p. 18. In the same report, Esty poses the question of “whether any advantages result from female representation in Boards of Education” (p. 14). It is possible that E. S. Esty (the first School Board President) and Frank D. Boynton (Superintendent from 1900–1930) have exerted the most influence in shaping Ithaca’s educational institutions. Again, for a further exploration, see Terzian (2000/2005) or “Frank David Boynton: In Memoriam” (n.d., Ithaca, NY).

²⁴ See Dieckmann’s (1986) *A Short History of Tompkins County*, p. 127. Since the last half of the 19th century, parochial schools have been the most widely available alternative to public schools for Catholics and non-Catholics. For more information, see Spring’s (2004) *The American School 1642–2004*.

²⁵ See E. S. Esty (1889), “Why We Have Succeeded.” *President’s Report—Annual Report of the Board of Education of the Village of Ithaca*.

²⁶ See “Legacy of Leadership: Cornell’s Twelve Presidents.” Available: http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/presidents/view_item.php?sec=3&sub=8.

²⁷ See John Harcourt’s (1983) *The Ithaca College Story*, p. 1. For more information, see The History Center’s exhibit “*From Downtown to South Hill: Ithaca College Is Ithaca’s College*.” The exhibit deftly traces the history of Ithaca College from a scattered and haphazard use of buildings throughout downtown to the sprawling campus on South Hill. Produced in partnership with the Friends of Ithaca College, this exhibit offers insight into the transformation from a music conservatory to one of the Northeast’s elite colleges. The History Center states, “When William Grant Egbert rented four rooms on East Seneca Street in 1892 for his Ithaca Conservatory of

Music, he not only founded what was to become Ithaca College he launched a partnership between the Ithaca community and the College.”

- ²⁸ See “A Republic in Miniature” (*New York Times*, 1897, May 5). In the article, George identifies four groups of youth the Junior Republic was designed to assist: “children of the vicious and criminals, children of improvident parents, those whose parents attempt to live by charity, and children born in foreign countries.” William A. George’s focus on industrial and behavioral training make him a national figure in educational reform. His “charity” was replicated in other states and included the short-lived National Junior Republic. For more information, see Jack Holl’s (1971) *Juvenile Reform in the Progressive Era: William R. George and the Junior Republic movement* as well as William George’s (1910) *The Junior Republic*. Today, the original Junior Republic has changed its name to the William George Agency for Child Services and has witnessed great fluctuation in the number of citizens/residents. In references to the fluctuations, the website states, “[c]hanges in administration of residential treatment in New York and the nation have led to fundamental restructuring of the program during the past two decades.” In this same time period, “The Agency has experienced continued growth.” Available: <http://www.georgejuniorrepublic.com>
- ²⁹ See Frank Boynton’s (1902, September) “High School Attendance” in *The School Review*, 10(7), p. 558. Boynton also had two shorter articles published on high school curriculum in this journal. *The School Review* begins at Cornell University and shortly after its creation moves to the University of Chicago. For more information on the *School Review*, see Harold Wechsler’s (1979, November) “The Primary Journal for Secondary Education, 1893–1938: Part I of a History of School Review,” found in the *American Journal of Education*. Boynton would also help shape curriculum at the state level and published his own civics book.
- ³⁰ Bower, B. “Re: Black Students at IC” (Personal Email—October 23, 2007). This date is taken from a graduation photo sent by Ithaca College archivists.
- ³¹ See Alpha Phi Alpha History website, available at <http://www.alphaphialpha.net/Page.php?id=54>. Part of the narrative regarding the founding of the fraternity is a response to segregation and isolation experienced by black students at Cornell. Effectively shunned from campus life, black students formed their own organization. Carol Kammen’s article “Ithaca man opened home to black CU students” (*Ithaca Journal*—2007, February 28) offers additional details on the founding of the fraternity. According to Kammen, “Edward Newton was a frequent debater at the Thursday evening Lyceum meetings at AME Zion Church on Wheat Street. He also sang bass in the Ithaca Colored Quartet directed by Miss Jessie Johnson. And he served, several times, as toastmaster at special church receptions, either at St. James or at the Methodist Chapel (now the Baptist Church) on North Albany Street just down the street from his house. Newton was also the man who offered his home to the African American students at Cornell in 1906 when they wanted to form a fraternity so they might enjoy the same college experience as white students. Newton is mentioned frequently by the historians of Alpha Phi Alpha as a community member who helped get the fraternity started.” The fall of 2006 witnessed more than 1,000 fraternity members convening in Ithaca to pay homage to the founding chapter and participate in a centennial celebration. For more information, see Rubicon Production’s (2006) video *Alpha Phi Alpha Men: A Century of Leadership*, or see Andrew Tutino’s “Alpha celebrates in Ithaca” (*Ithaca Journal*, 2005, November 21).
- ³² See James B. Clarke’s *Race Prejudice at Cornell*, found in the *Cornell Era* (1911), p. 199. Clarke writes an impassioned plea to his fellow Cornellians—particularly addressing white women—about the housing discrimination faced by black women. Clarke writes, “I do not believe, I cannot believe that Cornell women are so little appreciative of what the University has done for their sex that a majority of the occupants of Sage College would exclude girls from residence merely on account of

their color” (p. 198). Clarke also makes an appeal along economic lines, “Cornell University was founded by a farmer and is intended for farmer’s children” (p. 200).

³³ The 1912 brochure *Our Proposed New School: For all the children of all the People* (retrieved from Ithaca City School District Archives) is designed to persuade Ithacans to vote yes for a tax increase to support a new school building. On February 4, 1912, the high school building was destroyed by fire. Terzian (2005) states that the Board of Education believed the fire to be the result of foul play—possibly as an act of retaliation for the banning of Ithaca High School secret societies and fraternities the year prior. The community agreed to a tax increase and a new high school building opened its doors in 1914. This structure still stands as the DeWitt Mall.

³⁴ See the 1915 *Ithaca High School Annual*. Terzian’s research uses school newspapers as an untapped source of research material. The same can be said of yearbooks. The phrase “Cornell’s Largest Fitting School” is used in multiple years of the Annual (1906, 1907, 1913). Located in the “Advertisements” section, these full- and half-page ads offered information about the number of scholarships, university admissions, and the cost of tuition. All of the earliest yearbooks include a retelling of the high school’s history, and most list the addresses of students. The addresses not only indicate that students are coming from various Ithaca neighborhoods, but also that students traveled far and wide to attend Ithaca schools—from Rochester, NY; Pennsylvania; Mississippi; Wyoming; Canada; China; and elsewhere. The 1913 *Annual* ends its brief history by stating, “Notwithstanding our school is regarded as one of the largest and best preparatory schools in the country, each year sees it laying greater emphasis upon those lines of work which have to do with the large mass of students who will not and cannot go to college and whose formal education ends with their High School work” (n.p.).

³⁵ Ithaca’s black newspaper, *The Monitor*, had a short life span in 1923. Despite its brief run, *The Monitor*’s three issues (March, April, & June 1923) offer an in-depth look into black life and politics in Ithaca. The April edition contains an editorial that states, “The one big job for our nation’s leaders today is to take the money out of war and put it into the schools. Quit betting on gunpowder and bet on the kids” (p. 10).

³⁶ See “Thousands see 500 March in Klan Parade” (*Ithaca Journal*, 1925, October 5). Horne writes, “Photographs and a newspaper story in 1925 attest to the Klan’s visit, if not presence, in Ithaca when thousands watched five hundred march in a Klan parade for a rally of Tompkins County Klansmen at the Circus Flats” (p. 25). And Diedre Hill’s (1994) *Without Struggle There is no Progress: An Ethnohistoric study of Ithaca, New York’s African American Community* (Unpublished master’s thesis, Cornell University), identifies this event as a catalyst for the eventual creation of the Southside Community Center. Though the first attempts failed, the resulting political mobilization would become the Serv-Us League. And it was the Serv-Us League that tirelessly agitated for the creation of the Southside Community Center (Hill, p. 38).

³⁷ See “Many Ithacans Find Homes Flood-Ruined; Lehman Due Tonight” (*Ithaca Journal*, 1935, July 11; p.1). The July 8, 1935 flood took 8 lives, destroyed homes, marooned cars, killed crops, and much more. The *Journal*’s reporting includes stories about the lasting ill effects, emotional scars, emergency response time, looting, disease, and flood canal designs.

³⁸ Again, see Deidre Hill (p. 43). Hill’s (1994) work is one of the better resources on the history of the Southside Community Center (SCC) and captures over 25 oral histories. While the SCC officially began in 1934, the WPA project to construct a new building was completed in 1938. Mrs. Roosevelt’s commendation of “the two races working together” may have indicated a shift in interactions after the Ithaca Flood of 1935. Regarding racial interactions in the Southside community, Claudia Montague offers a different tale. She writes, “The history of the Southside neighborhood is a black and white story, though certainly not a simple one. The Southside has one of the highest concentrations of minority population in the city. Although the histories of the

Southside's black and white communities were sometimes interwoven, more often they ran parallel to each other. In some ways, the black community forged ahead on its own, creating a separate strand of the neighborhood's story" (p. 88). The Southside Community Center remains an important neighborhood institution as reflected by its mission statement: "Since its incorporation in 1934, the Southside Community Center, Inc., continues to affirm, empower, and foster the development of self pride among the African-American citizens of greater Ithaca. Through forums and activities in education, recreation, political and social awareness, the Southside Community Center is a community resource center. We serve as a vehicle to develop an appreciation for the contributions and presence of those peoples of African descent in the greater Ithaca community and in the larger world community." Additional information can be found in Simon Tarr and Louis Messiah's (2002) documentary film *Passing It On: The Southside Story*.

³⁹ See Mack's (1939) *Some factors which affect the scholastic progress of rural boys in Ithaca High School* (Unpublished master's thesis, Cornell University), pp. 65, 72. Mack employs a strict economic analysis of student performance and writes, "While the rural students are absorbed into the school population and do not present themselves as an independent entity in the student body, their adjustment is of necessity rather more extensive and intensive, because they must change types of school, make new friends, spend more time going to and from school, and to a larger extent depend upon themselves" (p. 3).

⁴⁰ See Emma R. Elliott's (1944) *Teaching personal economics in ninth-grade social studies classes as an expansion of the home economics curriculum at Ithaca High School* (Unpublished master's thesis, Cornell University), p. 20. Elliott's work is one of the more interesting writings on IHS. In trying to determine the interest in and desire for "home economics curriculum," Elliott also details the experiences of Ithaca's ethnic groups including Italians, Hungarians, and Assyrians. Elliott writes, "There is evidence that much status is drawn from the university, and, as is usual in college communities, there is some 'town and gown' feeling. Children of staff members form to some extent a 'group unto themselves' in public schools. Although they are not wealthy, they are designated as the best people in an intangible but quite definite way. Children of manual workers at the university, too, seem to be proud to say their fathers work for Cornell. Some of these workers and many of the office workers really enjoy the beauty and traditions of the campus. High school boys and girls are very 'college conscious.' A somewhat high per cent of local high school graduates attend college than is generally common, but a far larger group develop a definite feeling about it. Frequently this feeling takes the form of defense reactions—a desire to assert loudly that college is not necessary" (pp. 18–19).

⁴¹ See H. H. Wood's (1948) *A follow-up study of students in the class of 1947 of Ithaca High School and withdrawals of 1946–47* (Unpublished master's thesis, Cornell University), pp. 56–57. According to Wood, 60 members of the class of '47 indicated they were in college. More than half—35 of these members—were attending Cornell. The percentage of the total student body has decreased, but 30 or so IHS graduates continue to attend Cornell University each year. Wood surveyed some students who graduated as well as those who withdrew from school. His research attempted to understand why students withdrew from Ithaca High School, and Wood repeatedly comes to the conclusion that financial reasons may be a driving force. One student who withdrew offered the suggestion, "Have more discussion in social studies classes about 'progress and difficulties in our town'" (p. 76).

⁴² See Barbara Blais's (1953, May 29) *A report on the Proposed Consolidation of Ithaca Area School Districts*. The report is included as part of a prolonged attempt at school consolidation. Ithaca School District officials first inquire about rural consolidation in 1951. Conversations with New York State Board of Regents indicate that while consolidation may have some merits, it is not economically feasible. In a letter to Dr. Maurice G. Osborne (Chief, Bureau of Field Financial Services) dated September 5, 1951, Superintendent C. L. Kulp writes, "it seems fairly obvious that

it would be impossible to go ahead at this time with the further development of the proposed program. I hope that in the years ahead, however, it may be possible to develop some type of financial support which will alleviate or overcome the present financial ‘blocks’ under the existing constitutional limitations.” Two acts changed the constitutional limitations. On February 19, 1952, New York State passed “An Act to amend the education law, in relation to enlarged city school districts of cities of less than one hundred twenty-five thousand inhabitants” (No. 2568—Int. 2401). On February 7, 1955, New York State passed “An Act to amend the education law, in relation to the apportionment of public money to enlarged city school districts” (No. 1547—Int. 1481). These two acts paved the way for rural consolidation by providing large financial assistance to cover busing and transportation.

⁴³ See the *Ithaca Journal* article “Schools in New Consolidated District Gleam after Lots of Summer Work.” (1956, September 1). Among others, William Banner, *the rural school coordinator*, is photographed. Ithaca’s school consolidation plan comes in the midst of school integration just after the 1954 and 1955 Supreme Court decisions of *Brown v. Board I* and *Brown v. Board II* respectively. It should be noted that many students from outlying areas had been attending Ithaca schools prior to consolidation. For more general information on rural school consolidation, see DeYoung and Howley’s “The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation” (1990, Summer). The authors state, “School reform and school improvement are hardly stories about how to best structure learning opportunities for children. Rather, they are stories about the changing political economy of the United States. We argue that understanding the logic behind such ‘improvement’ as school consolidation in rural America demands understanding how the state legitimates its goals and, more particularly, how those goals override other cultural and intellectual interests which might serve citizens equally well, if not better” (p. 65).

⁴⁴ See C. R. Koons’s (1957) *A study of a senior low group in the Ithaca High School for special characteristics, personality traits and special methods of teaching* (Unpublished master’s thesis, Cornell University), pp. 53 & 78. Koons argues that families—particularly low-income families—are the single largest factor responsible for “low-group” achievement. This work represents a pronounced *social reproduction* argument.

⁴⁵ See “School Officials, Pupils Give Enthusiastic Okay” (*Ithaca Journal*, 1960, September 7, p. 2). The September 3, 1960, edition of the *Ithaca Journal* reported that the new school had “many of the features of the most modern schools of the country” (New High School Ready to Open, p. 2). This edition of the *Ithaca Journal* contains five stories and numerous pictures of the \$4.5 million new high school campus. The 1961 IHS Annual writes, “The year we entered a beautiful new school. Its nine buildings and all new facilities offered us untold advantages and opportunities. Even the atmosphere was different. The spaciousness, brightness, and size of classes pleased almost everyone” (p. 7). The most touted aspect of the new campus is the flexibility of the design. According to school officials and architects, the open-air corridors allow for easy access for community use, less feelings of confinement, easy evacuation, and accommodations for changes in the curriculum (“Design Seen Meeting Needs of Future,” p. 4). The new high school also includes a shift from 6 to 7 periods per day.

⁴⁶ See the History Center Archives on *Ithaca’s Council on Equality* (1961–65). According to the Executive Committee Meeting dated September 5, 1961, the climate at Ithaca High School warranted concern and immediate action. Ithaca’s Council on Equality was an active organization that worked with city and school officials to address areas of job discrimination, affordable housing, and schools. The History Center archives include minutes to meetings, agendas, and letters to and from civil rights organizations around the nation.

⁴⁷ See G. B. Clay’s article “Mason Describes Help Needed for ‘Disadvantaged’ Children” in the *Ithaca Journal* (1965, Jan 26). The advocacy for tracking is an ironic component of this plan as *tracking* is

frequently cited as a cause of school isolation. Members of the Council, Dr. Ed Hart, James Gibbs, Ben Nichols, Dr. Corinne Galvin, and others offered influence on the plan's development. Beyond the strong advocacy for a universal preschool and Head Start programs, the Community Involvement Plan called for a neighborhood youth corps, evening library hours, staff in-service trainings, and tutorial programs.

⁴⁸ See *1968 Ithaca High School Annual*, p. 181. The Afro-American Club still exists at IHS and is now called the African-Latino/a Club. The club organizes a year-end senior awards ceremony, an annual black college tour, and other events throughout the school year. The African-Latino Club has had a number of dedicated staff/faculty serve as advisors, beginning with Mr. Nixon, and is currently under the long-term care of Mrs. Lynn Saulsbury and Mr. Abe Lee.

⁴⁹ See Eric Kofi Acree's "Willard Straight Takeover Study Guide" (available at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/africana/guides/wsh.html>). More information is also available from Donald Downs's (1999) *Cornell '69: Liberalism And The Crisis Of The American University* and Charles R. Whitt's (1989) edited volume, *20th Anniversary Of The Willard Straight Hall Takeover Commemorative Book*. The Straight Takeover did more than produce a Pulitzer Prize-winning photo. It established one of the premiere Africana Studies centers in the nation. Despite Claudia Montague's claim that "The racial tensions that turned Cornell University into a battleground apparently did not affect the black community downtown" (p. 105), within a few months of the takeover, black parents demanded better educational services in local secondary schools. The result, the ICSD creates the *Black Counseling Services* housed at the SCC. In fact, from the founding of Alpha Phi Alpha to the Willard Straight Takeover to recent protests of the ICSD, black students at both Ithaca College and Cornell have been active members of the larger Ithaca community.

⁵⁰ See DuBois et al. (1969), *Black People and the Ithaca City School District*. This report of educational team of the 1969 Cornell Summer Work-Scholarship Program comprised the findings from five students who researched various aspects of the Ithaca school district. Chapter titles include Blacks and the Junior High School; Blacks and Ithaca High School; BOCES; The Central Administration; and Summer Programs in the Schools & the City. DuBois writes, "Three of the most obvious needs that remain unsatisfied—and thus present opportunities for changes of racial discrimination—are in the areas of curriculum, counseling and teaching personnel" (p. 3). The report addressed issues of faculty diversity, discipline, tracking, curriculum, and teacher expectations. It goes on to add, "There is a feeling that two high schools should exist. Black students complained about the physical distance involved . . . The programs at the schools are directed towards the white students, and are not attractive to the Black students . . . From the perspective of Black students, the Ithaca School System is a Fraud. Teachers are described as hypocrites. Half the teachers are out to help students, the other half are not" (p. 112).

⁵¹ See *Black Caucus of Ithaca records* (1979–81) #6572. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Ithaca, NY. The Ithaca Black Caucus was another organization that worked to address housing, job discrimination, and inequity in local schools. One of the primary focal points of the archived material documents the efforts to prevent a Sambo's restaurant from opening in Ithaca. In regards to local schools, the timeloop quote is taken from a letter, dated May 11, 1981, and authored by Nantambu Bomani to the ICSD Board of Education. For more information on the Black Counseling Service, see the ICSD Regular Board of Education Meeting (1969, December 22). The minutes state, "Dr. Bardwell introduced Mr. Carson Carr, Jr. and Assistant Director of Admission at Cornell University who explained the new Black counseling service to be conducted within the community. Mr. Carr and Mrs. Desdemona Jacobs, co-chairman, will be working closely with two Cornell University Work Study students in a program that will offer personal and educational counseling to black students (k–12) with their families or as individuals. Mr. Carr pointed out that this service is needed because many black students are not

adequately prepared for college or employment after leaving school. One of the first steps of this service will be talking with and counseling junior high school students concerning college entrance possibilities. Mrs. Ann Gunning, Director of Curriculum, will work closely with the program co-directors and will follow up the progress with a report to the Board of Education as the close of the school years" (pp. 3–4).

⁵² See Ithaca City School District Regular Board of Education Meeting Minutes, (1970, May 11).

⁵³ D. H. P. Hill's (1994) *Without struggle there is no progress: an ethnohistoric study of Ithaca, New York's African American Community*. Though this work is largely focused on the Southside Community Center, it is a necessary contribution to understanding the history of black folks in the greater Ithaca community. For additional information regarding Ithaca's neighborhoods, see Sisler et al.'s (1988) *Ithaca's Neighborhoods: The Rhine, the Hill, and the Goose Pasture*.

⁵⁴ See "Lehman Alternative Community School History." Available: <http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/acs/history.html> (accessed: Oct 25, 2007). For more information, see "Report on the Consideration of an Alternative Junior High School Program," found in Ithaca City School District Regular Board of Education Meeting Minutes, (1970, May 18).

⁵⁵ An editorial in the 1977 Ithaca High School Annual states, "The entire Ithaca community was faced with the task of the redistricting of the city schools . . . The results show that the schools was split upon a decision" (p. 6). Additionally, the *Resource Material for the Reorganization Study* (1976, November) stated, "In Ithaca, in the Spring of 1973, the Select Committee convened to review educational opportunity in our district, and recommended providing an educational setting for students that reflected a balanced racial and socio-economic mix. The district's professional staff concur with this view. The community's response to the questionnaire on reorganization confirms that the community too, is concerned with this issue."

⁵⁶ See Katherine Eisenberger's (1976, September 20) Presentation to the Board of Education—Questionnaire Responses. The household survey was conducted in June of 1976 and presented to the ICSD Board in September. The following return rates were disaggregated by elementary schools: 17% from Northeast, 15% from Belle Sherman, 15% from Cayuga Heights, 7% from Caroline, 5% from Central, 3% from Danby, 3% from Henry St. John, and 2% from Enfield. For additional information, see Jill Raygor's article "Then and Now" in the *Ithaca Times* (2004, December 1): http://www.zwire.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=13468911&BRD=1395&PAG=461&dept_id=546876&rfti=6. Raygor writes, "The [Board of Education] at the time decided to close a number of elementary schools including West Hill Elementary School (what is now the Lehman Alternative Community School), East Hill Elementary School (located at the corner of State Street and Stewart Avenue), Glenwood School (now the Franziska Racker Center) and Danby Elementary. Many of the schools were sold, and eventually repurchased (some at higher costs), by the district. Henry St. John and Cayuga Heights were also among the schools that were closed. Henry St. John, Glenwood and Danby were sold. Cayuga Heights was going to be sold, but because of a fuss raised by the community the building was not sold, but rented as a private school until eventually being reopened in 1989." The closing of schools during the 1970s redistricting/consolidation effort was a prominent concern in 2005. One of the ways ICSD officials sought to support staff during the most recent redistricting effort was to "Learn from veteran Belle Sherman staff about experiences with closing of Henry St. John" (available: <http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/redistricting/transition/ES-transition-plan.html>).

⁵⁷ See *Black Caucus of Ithaca records*, (1979–81) #6572. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library; Ithaca, NY.

⁵⁸ IBID.

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- ⁵⁹ IBID. In addition to the conference notice, the *Ithaca's Black Caucus Report of the Education Committee* (1979, October 1) outlines the need for an aggressive affirmative action policy, career awareness, open communication between school personnel and community, and the need for increased academic expectations.
- ⁶⁰ See *A Report of the Subcommittee of the Administrative Council of Board of Education Of the Ithaca City School District on the Space Problems of the Belle Sherman, Central and Northeast Schools* (1987, April). The draft report states, "these attendance districts should be drawn to ensure as much as possible that each of the four schools has a similar mix of children as determined by their racial and social and economic status" and adds, "We thus look upon redistricting as an opportunity to equalize the access of all children to the rich education that only student and staff diversity within the individual school can provide" (p. 7).
- ⁶¹ See WHCU Night Sound's 1986 radio segment *Affirmative action in Ithaca's Public Schools: An editorial on the cuts in affirmative action program and the status of its director Mrs. Beverly J. Martin*. The broadcast segment expresses anger and frustration regarding proposed cuts in the ICSD budget.
- ⁶² In 1987, the Ithaca Youth Council created, directed, and edited a 21-minute film entitled *Racism: The Intolerable Issue*. The film included a number of interviews from young people regarding their thoughts about racism in the Ithaca community. Many young folks recalled experiences with racial profiling, racial epithets, and lowered academic expectations. The film also includes an interview with an IHS teacher who states, "I . . . I feel that many of my students are real sensitive on the issue of race. Many of my black students—um—are understandably—uh weary—um distrustful. They—they're—they're not sure of until a teacher proves himself or herself about what the attitude is toward them on the basis of race."
- ⁶³ See Carol Kammen's (1988) *One Day in Ithaca: May 17, 1988*, p. 48. The quote is taken from Ithaca College professor Paul McBride's entry. This book is a compilation of writings from local Ithacans documenting the events, frustrations, celebrations, mundaneness, and general happenings on May 17, 1988. Termed the "Great Ithaca Write-In," Carol Kammen writes, "In this age when 'the next best thing to being there' is not a letter but rapid communication by telephone, when letter writing and diary keeping seem to be disappearing activities, we wondered what of our age and of our lives, other than photocopied reports and aggregate statistics, would be left to represent us to subsequent generations?" (p. 13).
- ⁶⁴ This WHCU Night Sounds program aired on February 26, 1991. This program, *Black Students at Ithaca High School*, aired a number of segments that offered commentary further exploring the experiences of black students in Ithaca high school. Black parents, students, teachers, and community members offered commentary on the status of education in Ithaca High School. Expressed concerns include the lack of academic preparedness, lack of ownership/belonging, lack of Afro-American curriculum, lack of black teachers/staff, and lack of effort to communicate with black families. Tracking is also a key issue, and near the end of the program, one student being interviewed states, "The classes they given—they . . . they not classes that will help you in college."
- ⁶⁵ The *Institutional Racism Strategic Action Plan* created by the ICSD (Personal Collection, 1994, June 18) includes a number of action points. Beyond opening up the decision-making process, the plan calls for principals to create diversity and multicultural goals; a district goal to hire 5 faculty of color; the development of a 5-year in-service education plan; support of paraprofessionals; and the involvement of families and community. The plan also describes and defines racism (prejudice + power) and states that the primary goal is "To improve academic achievement of African-American and Latino students throughout the Ithaca City School District, and create an academic atmosphere which nourishes minority students and encourages them to succeed" (p. 9).

⁶⁶ The Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) was one of the key agencies in the Leadership and Multicultural Alliance Program. Information regarding LMAP's activities and programs is currently housed in the MRC office files. In an email conversation with the MRC Director and LMAP facilitator, Ms. Audrey Cooper, she writes, "LMAP teaches how misinformation, myths and stereotypes keep us ignorant of one another's contributions and histories. We believe that a greater number of youth benefit by our participants' impact as role models in their schools and communities. At a minimum, we know they talk to friends about what they are learning and interrupt disrespectful interactions. LMAP spawns new friendships across differences" (Personal Email—2007, November 3).

⁶⁷ See Joseph Berger's article, "Two Classes of Students: Ithaca High Joins Debate" (*New York Times*—1995, June 4). Berger adds, "[T]he high school science teachers—with the blessing of the Superintendent, Dr. James E. Lorthridge, a black educator who grew up in the segregated South and has a strong interest in promoting diversity—decided they would merge honors and Regents classes starting in September. The move is expected to be a prelude to the Superintendent's goal of eliminating all tracking. In the vision they offered, students would be exposed to a richer spectrum of humanity and those with, say, good mechanical intuition could help those more adept at abstract theory and vice versa. The decision, like others across the country to cut classes for the gifted, has produced a powerful outcry here. On a cool spring evening, parents, including many Cornell professors, lined up at a cafeteria microphone to argue that the merger would water courses down to the level required by the statewide Regents exam." An article in the *CQ Researcher* ("Is the Democratic Dream of the 'Common' School Being abandoned in the nervous 1990s?"—July 26, 1996) also discussed Ithaca's attempts to detrack. The article states, "It is one thing to bemoan inequity, however, and another to design a public school that transcends it." Joel Spring (2004) argues that tracking is 2nd generation segregation. In other words, communities can segregate within a school and not just between schools. The hostility and tenor of the debate regarding Ithaca's proposal to detrack help to shed some insight on the role of privilege and reform. For additional information, see Alfie Kohn's (1998, January 1) "Only for My Kid: How Privileged Parents Undermine School Reform" (*Phi Delta Kappan*). Also, Tom Loveless's (2000) *The Tracking Wars* and Jeannie Oake's (2005) *Keeping Track; How Schools Structure Inequality* provides a solid background to the issues and concerns regarding the practice of tracking.

⁶⁸ For the quote, see "Ithaca City Police To Handle Probe Of High School Fight" in the *Syracuse Post-Standard* (1995, June 16). For additional information, see "Attack On 2 Students At Ithaca High School Spurs Rally Vs. Racism" *Syracuse Post-Standard* (1995, June 15). Both stories focus on IHS where four white students were accused of assaulting two black students.

⁶⁹ See ICSD Regular Board of Education Meeting Minutes (1995, June 27), pp. 13–14.

⁷⁰ See John Raible's (1996) *Office of Minority Student Affairs Year End Report for 1995–96*. The Assistant to the Principal for Minority Student Affairs originally began in 1969 as the Black Counseling Services. At the time of its elimination, it was referred to as the Assistant to the Principal for Multicultural Affairs. Raible's 1996 report states that the implementation of the district's Strategic Plan for the Elimination of Prejudice and Race "will benefit all students at IHS." Additional recommendations include building a sense of community among minority students, providing for ongoing relationships with adults from minority communities, using existing staff in new and creative ways to better meet the needs of minority students, and a proposed pilot class for at-risk minority students. Dr. Raible was also part of a 1995–96 lecture series held at Cornell's Africana Studies and Research Center focusing on Ithaca's black community. Beyond Raible's *African American Young Men 'At Risk' in the Public School System* (1996, March 27), the following videotaped lectures are available at AS&RC's John Henrik Clarke library: Don Barr's *Tracking in Education* (1996, April 4); Lucy Brown's *Parental Advocacy and Black Student Achievement in the Ithaca School System* (1995, Nov 15); Jackie Melton Scott's *Town-Gown*

Relations and the Black Community (1995, Sep 20); and Dianne Samms's *Black Politics in Ithaca* (1995, Oct 4).

- ⁷¹ See Tompkins County Board of Representatives' (1997) *Final Report: Tompkins County Future Search Conference on Racism*. The search conference was a 3-day workshop held at Ithaca College and was designed to "discover ways to create a future for all our community members that is free of racism" (p. 2). Beyond a list of recommended action steps, the final report identified key trends in local schools which included a tracking system that fails to meet individual student needs, the failure to educate students of color, the failure to teach students about the history of other cultures, the denial of racism, and too many committees with too few solutions.
- ⁷² This question is from August 27, 1997 meeting minutes of *Parents of African/Latino/a Students* (Personal Collection, Ithaca, NY). Parents of African/Latino/a Students (PALS) was an active organization of high school and middle school parents with children of color working to advocate for students as well as structural change. Additional PALS resources and documents are housed at the Ithaca High School Library.
- ⁷³ See Jon Spayde's (1997 May–June) "America's 10 Most Enlightened Towns" in the *Utne Reader*. This article begins a 10-year span where Ithaca finds its way onto a number national top 10 lists: Smart Places to Live; Best Places to Vacation; America's Five Best Mountain Biking Towns; Best Green Places; Best Lesbian Places to Live; Number-One City for Knowledge Workers; Number-One Emerging City; and more (*Ithaca Journal*, "Ithaca's good traits too long to list," 2007, April 21). For more information, see Gumprecht's "The American College Town" (*Geographical Review*, January 2003) and "Fraternity Row, The Student Ghetto, and the Faculty Enclave" (*Journal of Urban History*, January 2006). Yet, the *Utne* article has staying power and may be the most quoted moniker in Ithaca's modern history. In fact, being bestowed with such a title has become a blessing and a curse. Most important, however, is the article's main rationale for selecting Ithaca with the top spot. Spayde writes, "Most of all, it's because Ithacans genuinely believe that individuals can make a difference."
- ⁷⁴ See Jeff Spence's (1998) *Diversity at IHS* (English/Media Production Class, Ithaca, NY). This film explores gender, sexuality, race, and other factors of diversity at Ithaca High School. When asked to define diversity, one student replies, "Diversity means a lot of stupid meetings and being told how racist you are."
- ⁷⁵ Friedeborn, K. "Re: Rural-Urban Adventure Program" (Personal Email, 2007, November 3). Mrs. Friedeborn is the Youth Development Division Coordinator for the Ithaca Youth Bureau and was one of the facilitators of the 21st Century grant designed to bring together students from Enfield and Beverley J. Martin elementary schools. Videos, evaluations, and other documents are housed at the Ithaca Youth Bureau.
- ⁷⁶ See *Race and Education at Ithaca High School* (p. 4). Locally known as the Turner and Barr Report (1998), the final draft includes a list of patterns that emerge from the data. The list includes no general agreement that low academic achievement is a serious problem, a sense that problems that do exist are external to the high school, and a lack of knowledge or understanding of systemic racism. The report also states, "There were several who expressed anger and/or impatience with all this talk about race all the time. Some expressed things are going well at IHS" (p. 9). One of the action steps called for an open and honest dialogue about discipline. The report adds, "These data continue to show a resistance to critically look at the internal structures of the school e.g. the curriculum and pedagogical approach to education in Ithaca High School" (p. 7). For most of the 1990s, Drs. Turner and Barr taught a course, *Race, Class and Privilege*, for ICSD staff and faculty.
- ⁷⁷ See Jose Paulino's editorial, "IHS Administration not so enlightened" (*Ithaca Journal*, 1998, September 17, p. 13A). Paulino's resignation was also the focus of a front-page article on the same

day (Margaret Claiborne's "IHS minority officer quits, unsupported," p. 1A). Citing an example of his perceived lack of support, Paulino stated the administration had "little concern for a racial epithet scrawled on his office door" (p. 1A).

- ⁷⁸ From 1999 to 2002, Margaret Claiborne authored a series of *Ithaca Journal* articles on the issues facing the Ithaca City School District. This quote comes from Claiborne's article "ICSD board plans forum response" (1999, December 19). A small sampling Claiborne's *Ithaca Journal* articles also include "ICSD forum to address race issues" (1999, October 27), "ICSD Board told to improve minority hiring" (1999, December 16), "Emotions high over ICSD restructuring" (2001, April 29), and "ICSD head fields parents' questions" (2002, April 5).
- ⁷⁹ See Missy Globerman's "Year in Review" (*Ithaca Journal*, 1999, December 31). Globerman's story refers to the closing of J.C. Knight barbershop, the tensions within the ICSD regarding the hiring and retention of staff of color, and a racially motivated assault where two young men (a black man and a white man) were assaulted by a group of white youth while attending a high school graduation party.
- ⁸⁰ See Jay Mathews's article in the March 13, 2000, edition of *Newsweek* ("The 100 Best High Schools," 135[11]). While questions about the methodology are not to be ignored, the *Newsweek* ranking is another accolade in a long history of academic recognitions. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), there are more than 20,000 high schools in the United States. As such, Ithaca High is listed in the top 0.5% nationally. The article states, "These schools challenge kids by encouraging them to take tough high-school courses, producing students who can succeed later in college."
- ⁸¹ See *A Retrospective Study of the Impact of Race And Class on Academic Success at Ithaca High School*, p. 16. Locally known as the Barr and Bock Report (2000), the study includes eight policy recommendations toward achieving equity. In short, the authors found that socioeconomic status and race are strong predictors of academic level, special education identification, and class rank. The authors state, "Our primary objective in doing this study was to provide data that would challenge the thinking and planning of the school district and the community on issues related to the academic performance of low, socio-economic, poor, dark skinned and white students. We hope our recommendations will be taken seriously because it is time the Ithaca City School District brought the social class issue out of the closet and on to the table" (p. 18).
- ⁸² See Margaret Claiborne's article "Emotions high over ICSD restructuring" in the *Ithaca Journal* (2001, April 29). The controversy surrounded the office and work of Dr. Deborah Manning. The term "downsize" is used by Claiborne; however, the author also quotes some community members who called the manner and process for this decision "dirty" and "underhanded." To date, while the Multicultural Education component has become the Instructional Specialist for Educational Equity, the affirmative action position has not been replaced.
- ⁸³ See guest column in the *Ithaca Journal* by Members of the Ithaca City School District Affirmative Action Committee, "Why 'Affirmative' committee is upset" (2001, May 3, p. 11A). Committee members wrote this guest column after the affirmative action committee was disbanded without consultation or notice.
- ⁸⁴ The beginnings of the Village at Ithaca (VAI), an organization whose mission is to "advocate for excellence and equity in the Ithaca City School District by developing strategic community relationships to ensure that students, particularly Black, Latino, and low-income, consistently meet or exceed district and state standards of achievement," was captured by Margaret Claiborne's "Agenda set for minority students" (*Ithaca Journal*—2002, February 5). At a standing-room only gathering, Cornell University professor James Turner "acknowledged a sense of déjà vu, that the issues facing the group were not new. 'But they are perennially profound issues,' he said." The

founding of the VAI continues a legacy of community organizing working to address the historic education gap in Ithaca schools.

- ⁸⁵ See Ithaca City School District Board of Education Meeting Minutes (2002, August 27), p. 5. The Board also approved three other goals: to increase community involvement, continue to develop more effective evaluations for instructional programs, and refine the “educational continuum” approach to constructing a budget.
- ⁸⁶ See *Ithaca Journal* article “School pushes for race dialogue” (2004, March 27) by Anne Ju. In an article earlier that same week, “5 teens charged after fight at IHS” (2004, March 24), Ju includes a quote from ICSD Superintendent Judith Pastel: “Even though the fight took place between a group of white students and a group of African-American students, Pastel said that from what she heard from administrators, ‘it was not racially motivated.’” Despite the claims from administration, many students and community members believed “race” to be a significant player in the tensions that simmered throughout the remainder of the 2004 spring term.
- ⁸⁷ See United States Department of Justice—Community Relations Service. (2003). *Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together (SPIRIT)*. [Brochure], Washington, DC. The SPIRIT group selected representatives from the student body to engage in conversations and participate in retreats.
- ⁸⁸ See *Elements of a Strategic Action Plan to Promote Equity in the Ithaca City School District*. Work for the plan began in 2003, publicly introduced in 2004, and finalized in Spring 2005. The 31-page document is available at: <http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/board/equity/EquityStrategicPlan.pdf>. The plan highlights numerous areas where equity work needs to occur: cultural and educational events, family and community advocacy and involvement, community involvement, communication, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs, curriculum, clinical support for students, supplemental programs (academic and non-academic), targeted academic support, teacher preparation, recruitment and retention of diverse staff, staff development, leadership development, research on and implementing of “best practices”, assessing causes of inequity, and data analysis.
- ⁸⁹ See Roberta Wallitt’s (2004) *Breaking the Silence: Asian American Students Speak Out* as well as her dissertation research, *Breaking the Silence: Cambodian Students Speak out about School, Success and Shifting Identities* (University of Massachusetts). Referring to her dissertation research, Wallitt writes, “The study examined how the participants’ cultural identities and family expectations influenced their interaction with the school system and how teachers’ practices and institutional policies affected the young people’s striving for academic achievement . . . This study generated a number of significant findings that emerged from the data. One finding illustrated the extensive influence their families and cultural teachings exerted on the students’ lives, most relevantly in the school context. Other findings depicted the school experiences that supported the students in their educational journey as well as the obstacles that hindered their progress.”
- ⁹⁰ See Anne Ju’s article “Minority affairs assistant resigns; position reinstated” (*Ithaca Journal*—2001, April 29). While the position was reinstated, the office had been the focus of budgetary cuts for decades. Just a year prior, the ICSD Board decided that the Office of Multicultural Affairs office could operate as a half-time position. The proposition of further cuts also caused Board member Dr. Roger Richardson to remark, “I’m concerned, given our board goal of equity. This is the elimination of a key position,” quoted in Ju’s article “ICSD’s Pastel proposes \$77.8M spending plan” (*Ithaca Journal*—2004, March 17).
- ⁹¹ See *Village at Ithaca Video Project* (2005). Students in the video discuss racism, tracking, feelings of isolation, curriculum, and what makes a good teacher. When a student was asked, “Have you ever talked about racism in any classes?,” he replied “Nope.”
- ⁹² See Anne Ju’s “How our kids become unequal” (2005, February 12). *Ithaca Journal*, p. 1A.

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- ⁹³ The Ithaca case is *Concerned Citizens For Neighborhood Schools v. Judith Pastel, as Superintendent Of The Ithaca City School District* (2005). The Tennessee case is *Concerned Citizens For Neighborhood Schools, Inc. v. The Board Of Education Of Chattanooga, Tennessee* (1974). In 1974, a group of parents also called *Concerned Citizens for Neighborhood Schools* challenged Tennessee's compulsory school attendance law in protest to desegregation orders. Plaintiffs argued that their children would suffer "irreparable damage." Redistricting in many communities have closely followed the battle patterns of integration.
- ⁹⁴ See Kerrie Frisinger's "Culture change in ICSD seen as key" (*Ithaca Journal*—2005, May 6). The controversy around the usage of *War Comes to Willy Freeman* at Boynton Middle School—particularly the lack of preparation and context regarding the word *nigger*—began a larger conversation about pedagogy and cultural responsiveness. The resulting fallout included debates of censorship and tensions between black parents and the school as well as tensions between the black principal and some staff.
- ⁹⁵ See Executive Summary: The Community Foundation of Tompkins County Critical Issues Roundtable: *Inclusive Communities: Breaking the Barriers* (Personal Collection, 2005, April 1). As stated in the executive summary, more than 120 people attended this roundtable, and the program "began with reflections from youth on their own experiences of when they did not feel they belonged, or were excluded, and what could have been done that would have changed their experience." It also included action steps and suggestions to work toward inclusion.
- ⁹⁶ See C. Ayala and O. Jarrah (2006, November 6). "Tripod Survey: Necessity? Frivolity?" *Ithaca High School Tattler*. Available: http://www.ihstattler.com/november2006/view.php?a=_ntripod. Additionally, the *Minority Student Achievement Network* (<http://msan.wceruw.org/>) and John Ogbu's (2003) *Black American Students in An Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement* are additional sources of information regarding black students in so-called high-performing schools.
- ⁹⁷ The media coverage regarding Amelia Kearney's lawsuit is too numerous to include. There have been continuous stories in local Ithaca papers as well as letters and editorials in the *Ithaca Journal* (see: <http://www.theithacajournal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/99999999/SPECIAL02/70912007&template=theme&theme=KEARNEY>). The *Ithaca Times* included a cover story, "A Mother's Struggle" (October 10, 2007) as did the *Tompkins Weekly*: "Racial Tensions simmering" (October 15–21, 2007). The *New York Times* also ran a story on the hostilities spurred by the case—David Staba's "Tension tied to race percolates in Ithaca" (*New York Times*—October 23, 2007, p. 1B). Further yet, the case has been profiled by local television media and out-of-town reports (Syracuse news stations). The earliest reference in the *Ithaca Journal* (May 8, 2007) begins by stating, "The New York State Division of Human Rights has determined that there is probable cause to believe the Ithaca City School District engaged in unlawful discrimination against a DeWitt Middle School student during the 2005–06 school year."
- ⁹⁸ See *Ithaca Journal* editorial "Wrong remedy for deep wound" (2006, April 18). In using a free-speech argument to advocate in support of the right to wear/display the confederate flag in school, the *Ithaca Journal* editorial states, "The only remedy is to address the underlying hatred that inspires these tensions; and to address this hatred, in all its forms, in the very aggressive and very public way that Ithaca High School and Ithaca in general has steadfastly avoided. It will be uncomfortable. It will be embarrassing. Ithaca and the surrounding communities will have to look in that mirror, shed our beloved pretensions of enlightenment and admit what we and our children really are as burdened with the American legacy of racism as every other community in this nation."
- ⁹⁹ The First Annual Equity Report Card (2006) was a joint effort of the ICSD with the Village at Ithaca. Statistical data was collected for 16 measures of academic performance "as an attempt to establish

baseline data” and to “measure the current degree of equity in our school district.” The 48-page full report indicates some pronounced disparities in the realm of special education identification, advance placements courses, suspensions, drop-outs (force-outs), and test scores. The equity report card has become the baseline measurement of equity work.

¹⁰⁰ See Audrey Cooper’s guest editorial “Is ICSD really committed to equity?” (*Ithaca Journal*, 2006, September 20). Cooper writes, “As members of ACTION, we are writing to express our grave concern about the policies and practices of the Ithaca City School District that appear to contradict the Board of Education’s stated goal ‘to eliminate race and class as predictors of academic achievement.’ . . . The presence of a diverse staff in the schools is crucial to the achievement of students of color, as well as important for all students preparing for life in an economically and culturally diverse world. If the ICSD Board of Education is truly committed to its stated goals, it’s time that they face up to the failure of the administration and insist the superintendent accept the offers of those who can assist them to realize these goals.”

¹⁰¹ Selected Notes/Themes from Student Panel/Community Forum (2006, March 27). Among a long list of noted concerns, student participants also made the following statements: “It is not the after school stuff, it is the out of school stuff that motivates me,” and “I don’t feel comfortable saying what I want to in most classes.”

¹⁰² See City of Ithaca Common Council Proceedings—Regular Meeting Minutes dated (2006, April 5). The city Common Council also “approved resolution to be presented to the ICSD Board of Education requesting that action be taken to recruit additional employees of color; equal discipline in the schools, access to college opportunities and increased dialogue between students and guidance counselors; Council request for continued support for affirmative action positions in the ICSD budget; Provide mandatory diversity training for all staff; Institutionalize diversity by increasing social clubs and focus groups; Adopt zero tolerance for racial slurs, other forms of harassment or intimidation” (p. 20).

¹⁰³ See Tim Ashmore’s “Groups call for equity in ICSD” (*Ithaca Journal*—2007, May 23). A broad collaborative effort was organized for the protest as the article indicates, “Organizers of the rally included Activists Committed to Interrupting Oppression Now, or ACTION; The Village at Ithaca; The Greater Ithaca Activities Center; and local activist groups Urgent and the Race Liberation Alliance.” The protest was generally organized to express displeasure with the districts treatment of students of color as well as to specifically support the case of Amelia Kearney and her daughter.

¹⁰⁴ See Topher Sanders’s article “ICSD Board will pursue injunction in race hearing” (*Ithaca Journal*—2007, September 26). The decision from the ICSD Board to challenge Amelia Kearney’s case via Human Rights jurisdiction drew immense criticism from students, faculty, and national organizations. The Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund sent ICSD Board members a letter outlining the potential dangers and devastating legacy should the Human Rights challenge be successful. The Lambda Legal letter stated, “Though the Board of Education’s challenge to the NYHRL lacks merit and will likely be rejected by the courts, the repercussions of a Board of Education victory on this issue could be so severe for the state’s youth that it is simply unconscionable for the Board to press forward with its argument challenging the law’s scope . . . We acknowledge the Board’s legal right to defend itself. To elect a defense that would undermine crucial human rights protections, however, is a shortsighted, unjustified and potentially destructive strategy that flies in the face of the Board’s broader duty to stand up for all students.” The Board would eventually overturn the vote and instruct its legal team to cease with the challenge. This was due, in no small part, to the Lambda letter.

¹⁰⁵ See Topher Sanders’s article “Protest spills into ICSD offices” (*Ithaca Journal*—2007, October 2). The Journal indicates that the protest included calls for the superintendent to resign.

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- ¹⁰⁶ See Student letter, “Don’t Let Jena Happen Here” (2007, October 19). Also see Topher Sanders’s article “Protest, lockdown at IHS over inequity” (*Ithaca Journal*—2007, October 11). The article states, “Ithaca High School was put on lockdown Wednesday after a group of students began protesting and disrupting classes to voice their concerns about discrimination at the school, while a few white students allegedly made references to ‘nooses’ and yelled insults such as ‘welfare’ at the largely minority crowd . . . The student-organized protest came after an angry crowd of students and community members disrupted Tuesday’s school district board meeting. The crowd was upset about the district’s legal challenge of New York’s human rights law. The challenge is part of a defense in a discrimination claim by Amelia Kearney that the district failed to protect her daughter from alleged racial harassment.”
- ¹⁰⁷ See Topher Sanders’s “Absences spike over IHS safety” (*Ithaca Journal*, 2007, October 19). Roughly 700 students stay home from Ithaca High School in response to threats of violence and the alleged existence of “hit lists.”
- ¹⁰⁸ The *Ithaca Journal* penned this statement in its editorial “ICSD legal challenge” (2007, October 25). The editors also stated, “[T]he district must now defend itself on the merits of the case where Kearney alleges that the district discriminated against her daughter when it did not properly intervene and protect her against racial harassment during the 2005–06 school year.”
- ¹⁰⁹ See Kellet, C. M. (2008, April 11). Recommended Findings of Fact, Opinion and Decision, and Order. *Kearney v. Ithaca City School District*, pp. 11–12.

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